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## THE MERITS OF WHOLEMEAL BREAD

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

A SCHOOLTEACHER friend of mine was asked by a boy in her class the other day why wholemeal bread was regarded as superior to white bread. Her reply was that it contained roughage. But if that were the only merit of wholemeal bread, one could easily substitute badly cooked vegetables for it. And not only the teacher but the nearest grocer often appears to be unaware of the extra value which wholemeal has over white bread. I have more than once been told by a grocer (when he had only white bread left in the shop!) that there was no particular advantage in wholemeal bread—it was "only a fad." Now add what the waitress says when she has no wholemeal bread to offer you at a restaurant—"It is only coloured anyway"—and you have a cross section of the attitude of the people on this subject. As well, we have the general argument from the man of the family, "I have always eaten white bread and look how well I am." The total result of these attitudes is that 90 per cent. of the bread eaten in New Zealand is white bread.

Now contrast this with the point of view found among nutrition advisers by the Minister of Food in Britain during the present war. He stated in the House of Lords recently that he was "impressed by the unanimity of scientific opinion on the nutritive value of wholemeal bread." Dr. Harriette Chick, whose name is well known for her scientific reliability, has recently forecast the possibility that the "manufacture of white flour as we know it now may be prohibited." Whether this latter statement, applicable as it is to conditions in England, implies the same forecast for New Zealand, will depend upon the results of experiments that are at present in progress in this country.

Opinion in America among experts in the field of nutrition is apparently along the same line as opinion in England. At a recent conference on National Fitness (just two months ago), a conference which was part of their National Defence Programme, and which was attended by 800 delegates, including the leading nutrition experts of the U.S.A., Dr. Lydia Roberts (whose wide experience has won her the world's respect) advocated that cereals should be "either wholemeal or enriched"—by the latter term she referred to white flour to which vitamins and minerals had been artificially added.

In this article I shall make the brief statement that the advantages of wholemeal bread lie not only in its roughage (the indigestible residue which it leaves and which acts as a stimulus to promote the movements of the digestive system) but in the vitamins it contains and in the large contribution it makes toward the iron that we need. Summarising its value as a food for preventing constipation and for preventing anaemia, we shall leave further points to be debated in succeeding articles.

(Next week: "Tonsils and Adenoids" (1), by Dr. H. B. Turbott.)