

NUTRITION AND RESISTANCE TO DISEASE

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

THE Minister of Health spoke to us recently of the duty of everyone to keep fit during this time of national emergency, stating that it was reprehensible to contract an illness that was preventable and thus impose an extra burden on the doctors at a time when they are already over-worked.

Health and vitality are dependent in large measure on a proper choice of foods. The following medical examples will serve to illustrate this point. Among children in England, Dr. Kerridge found that deafness due to middle ear disease was about four times as common among children of the poorer classes as among children of the well-to-do; she found that the diets of the children which suffered from this type of deafness were specially low in proteins and vitamins. Another doctor, a specialist in ear diseases writes that "chronic middle ear disease is common only in communities where nutrition is deficient; inflammation of the middle ear is partially a nutritional problem." Again, Dr. Helen MacKay found that in many cases, disease of the middle ear was often accompanied by an anaemia; lack of iron in the food caused the anaemia, the resulting anaemia lowered their resistance, and thus the children became susceptible to infections. Her work goes to show that at least some cases of deafness can be traced ultimately to poor intake of iron. A good argument for including liver, wholemeal bread, egg yolk, vegetables and fruit in the diet.

Example from Canada

An illustration of the effect of the diet of the mother on the subsequent health of the offspring comes from some Canadian work during the past year. A group of 200 mothers attending the ante-natal clinic were found to be having poor diets. Half of the total number were given extra food each day as follows: one egg, 30 ounces of milk, half an ounce of wheat germ, one ounce of cheese, 4½ ounces of canned tomatoes, one orange. In the improved-diet group, there were no miscarriages, stillbirths or deaths of infants in the first six months of life; in the poor diet group there were 13 per cent. There were far fewer complications during labour. Moreover the babies showed a striking difference in

their condition during the first six months of life.

Wars generally give us examples of the increased prevalence of tuberculosis in countries that are blockaded; already in Europe the figures for this disease are on the increase in those places that are short of good food.

Milk and Mental Alertness

Even mental health is dependent on proper nutrition. Here in New Zealand, many teachers have reported the increased mental alertness of children following the introduction of the milk-in-schools scheme.

Dr. McLester in his presidential address to the American Medical Association stated that "In the future, science promises to those races who will take advantage of the newer knowledge of nutrition a larger stature, greater vigour, increased longevity and a higher level of cultural attainment."


(Next week: "Typhus Fever, the Scourge of Troublous Times," by Dr. H. B. Turbott.)



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—M.B.