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Advice on Health (No. 87)

CAVIARE TO THE GENERAL

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

WHEN I first heard this phrase quoted, I thought that, it uttered an extremely snobbish sentiment, but in his simile concerning an unappreciated speech, Hamlet implied that the common folk of Denmark have not had their tastes educated to relish caviare. Though the



"general" of Denmark could not afford to cultivate the taste for caviare, it is nevertheless a common enough article of diet enjoyed by the "proletariat" (or shall I call them *tovarischi*?), of Russia. Herein lies a profound gustatory—and therefore nutritional—truth: that our tastes have to be educated to appreciate the foods that we eat, a process that occurs in babyhood and infancy. Treated properly, the human offspring, with few exceptions, eventually grows to like any food that it is offered, whether it be horsemeat in Belgium, frozen raw seal in the Arctic, putrefied eggs, bird-nest soup, or dog flesh in China, soured milk in Bulgaria, sauerkraut in Germany, frogs and snails in France, unsweetened black currant juice in pakeha New Zealand, or pirau corn in the Maori north, over-ripe pheasant among the gentry of England, or human flesh among the South Sea Islanders.

There is a much greater proportion of the population to-day who like tomatoes than when this valuable article of diet was first introduced. It was commoner then to hear the phrase "a liking for tomatoes is an acquired taste." The new generation of young New Zealand folk are fortunately growing up with a greater liking for milk than the past generation, though the Americans still surpass us in this respect.

Teach Them Young

Any new food given to a baby is apt to produce an expression indicating distaste. But if baby is started off with only a drop or two of cod-liver oil, or only a quarter-teaspoonful of sieved vegetable, or only a few drops of orange juice or black currant purée, the amount may gradually be increased.

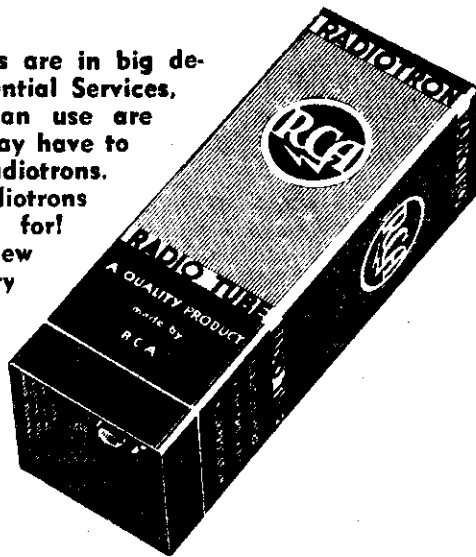
Not only is it desirable to get the child used to new tastes, but the texture of the food is also extremely important. One comes across cases of malnutrition in young children who are getting too little of certain foods (notably protein foods like eggs, or fish, or liver, etc.), simply because they do not like the gritty feel of the cooked protein food, after they have been accustomed to the smooth feel of milk or puréed vegetables. One medical authority, whose attitude is that puréed vegetables should be started between the fourth and fifth month, writing on this topic of the texture of foods, states, "Beginning at about eight months of age, it is desirable that the baby should become accustomed to foods coarser than those that are finely sieved. For the development of good feeding habits, it is necessary that the baby become accustomed early to variety in texture and flavour."



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