

FOOD LESSONS FROM THE DEPRESSION

By HENRIETTA RIPPERGER

Experts Have Learned, Through Relief Work, That the Simple Diet of Old Is the Best

IN the very near future some million persons receiving relief in the State and city will get cash instead of food tickets, and with the money they will get expert advice on what to eat.

The theories behind that advice have been tested in the laboratory of New York's relief work. The unemployed, like the army, have been the objects of careful study and experiment. The result is a body of opinion which is of wide general interest.

What we have learned about food parallels what we have learned about life through a period of distress: that old friends are the ones who stand by us. No strange diet has been evolved to solve the problems of the thousands living on food allowances of \$1.10 to \$1.65 per person each week. (The amount varies with the age.) Times of real danger to our national health have driven us away from fads back to the foods which have been the mainstay of the human race since hard-earned followed the cattle in their yearly migrations over the steppes north of the Black Sea, and settled down at last to cultivate the wild grain for their own use.

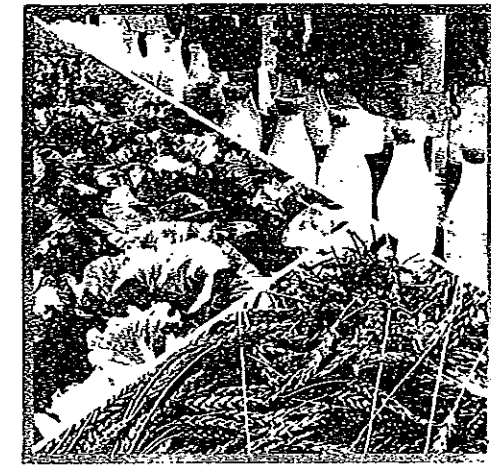
FIRST in importance as food is milk. Relief dietitians, like Robert Louis Stevenson, love the friendly cow with all their hearts. They insist that everybody needs milk every day, the amount varying from a cupful for a healthy adult, to a quart, for an undernourished person and for each child.

They also love the "all can." Unsweetened evaporated milk in the can has for years been recommended for children traveling to the Orient or to any quarter of the world where the milk supply is not above suspicion. It is a standby to campers and to yachtsmen of the class who man their own galleys. But on the whole, there has been a prejudice against it—a prejudice now being removed by the dietitians. They assert that such milk has the same food value as Grade B pasteurized milk.

Between the two there is a wide difference in price. Three tall cans of evaporated milk cost 17 cents, while Grade B milk costs 11 cents over the counter and 12 cents delivered, without counting the 3-cent deposit on the bottle. This disparity in cost is due to the fact that raw materials have gone down much faster than labor, and labor is a large item in bottled pasteurized milk.

Canned milk, however, will never replace fresh milk as a beverage so long as the public cares about flavor. Evaporated milk or condensed milk is an acceptable substitute for cream, in hot coffee served in the cabin on a day when the decks are awash, and the lee rail is hidden under a smother of sea, or when after a long swim or a hard day of paddling, the pot is put over a fire on the beach. But in general it is recommended mostly for cooking.

Relief funds do not provide for certified milk, but dietitians recom-



Photos From Cafeter and Eating Galleries. Three Mainstays of the Basic Diet—Milk, Wheat, Vegetables.

mend it, instead of pasteurized milk, for small children wherever possible.

BREADSTUFFS and cereals follow milk on the list of essentials. Although macaroni and the like are satisfactory, the preference is given to dark breads and to whole grains.

Like A. A. Milne's King, the unemployed do like a little bit of butter for their bread, or even "marmalade instead." Fats and sugar are to be bought sparingly, however, as accessories to the general diet.

Small as the allowance of sweets is, it is nevertheless important. Here the depression has only confirmed wartime experience. Bruce Bairnsfather, in one of his cartoons drawn at the front, shows a man in uniform sprawling on his stomach to answer the trench phone. The air around him is filled with flying debris. A voice from G. H. Q. is inquiring "into the state of his supply of tinned strawberry jam. Bairnsfather called it, if memory serves, "The Things That Really Matter." Elsewhere he refers to the jam that won the war.

Like sweets, fats are important, and must not be forgotten even if only a small quantity is required. Here too the facts learned in 1914-1918 are confirmed by the experiences of the years from 1929 to 1934.

THERD on the list of essentials come the products of the garden. Carrots and cabbages, yellow turnips, colons and potatoes, vegetables that keep, are the fare of farmers the world over. They are the mainstays of the low-budget table. Small carrots, grated and eaten raw in salad, have ev-

erything, even flavor, to their credit.

Cabbages are equally important. A depression story told to this writer by a German girl from Pennsylvania illustrates their value as food. The girl, who was picked up on the streets of New York, said that her father, a house-painter, had been out of work for months. The family had bought a pig on the hoof and a barrel of sauerkraut and had lived on them for three months. It was only when this supply ran low that she came to the city to seek employment. If the appearance of the girl, who was plump and hearty, was any index, her diet had been quite satisfactory.

On the vegetable list, too, come dried beans and also the lentil, which has been the fare of artists in studio garrets for years, and will be wherever art is pursued for art's sake and penury is "the wages of the pen."

THE fruits suggested are, first, the bananas and, second, dried apricots, prunes, raisins and so on. The fondness of children for bananas, once considered a dangerous taste, is now rated as an asset, for no fruit is more nourishing.

The American is very dependent on his morning orange juice with his coffee and his paper, but if he is on relief he will substitute tomato juice from the can, at a fraction of the price.

If children were allowed to vote about their diet they might not agree with the choice of cod liver oil as part of their fare. As a matter of fact, however, the depression has taken cod liver oil out of the class of medicines and put it into the category of foods. The oil is no longer considered a luxury for the sick; it is part of the prescribed diet for the undernourished and for all growing youngsters.

On the food tickets extra allowance was made for cod liver oil. It was signified by the letters C. Z. O., and the sum indicated could be spent only for that.

The place occupied by meat in the relief menu is small. The normal well-fed person, retiring to the traditional desert island, would probably prefer to take with him one good roast of beef than all the rice in China, or all the broccolli in somebody's garden. But it must be remembered that the unemployed are not eating primarily as a means of enjoyment. Neither are they engaged in hard physical labor; they are not loading cargoes or pushing wheelbarrows full of sand. It is true that their women are working, but women long ago learned to "do without," and more often than not

in a household on relief the meat is given to "himself." Meat, fish, eggs and cheese are to be bought in small quantities after other food has been provided for, the allowance considered necessary running to a couple of pounds of meat, fish, half a dozen to a dozen eggs and a little cheese in a family of five.

THEORIES? Perhaps. But they have been tested in the slums of New York. In one district an intensive study has been made to show what could be done if food was intelligently planned for, bought and prepared. The district has long been accustomed to poverty, but until recently has been self-supporting. Over a period of ten years a group of dietitians have assisted these people in managing their households. The result has been that the general level of health and nourishment has been raised to a marked degree.

Nor is this the only illustration of the fact that intelligent spending is half the battle. It is not at all unusual to find that a family, after going on relief, improves in health because of the supervision of its diet.

No one wishes to say a kind word for the depression, for the toll on health will undoubtedly be appalling. But along with the ills it released upon us came one good: a better and a far more general understanding of what it means to be properly fed. Information is embodied in pamphlets issued by relief agencies and by the Federal Government. Their distribution is not confined to New York or to the cities. One sees them in the remotest country school house as well as on the tenement house table. The facts are there for any one who cares to use them.



Harvesting Potatoes. Euter Gallouos.