

THIRTIETH SCIENTIFIC MEETING—SIXTEENTH ENGLISH MEETING
LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE AND TROPICAL MEDICINE,
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THE TRAINING, QUALIFICATIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF DIETICIANS*

Morning Session: Chairman, Professor J. R. MARRACK

Professor J. R. Marrack (London Hospital, Whitechapel, London, E.1): Sir Jack Drummond, who was to be chairman at this meeting, is still in America; in his absence the mantle of Elijah has fallen upon a minor prophet, myself.

If the objects of the Food and Agriculture Organization are to be achieved, definite planning and control of the production and distribution of food, and popular instruction about nutrition will be essential. Dieticians will have an extremely influential position on account of their direct contact with the people who actually eat the food. On the one hand they will learn how these people react to the country's food policy; it will be largely on their experience that those who have the direction of this policy will depend for this information. On the other hand they will be able to explain the reasons for any changes in the food supply and clear up prejudices and misunderstandings. They could also, if their training were superficial, create new prejudices and superstitions. We have an example of such possibilities in the popularization of the condition called "acidosis" occurring in children. It was spread by a certain type of children's nurse who claimed to have some training. They overbore people who should have known better by their claim of practical experience; they impressed mothers with their alleged training and suggested to children that it was their duty to be sick after certain foods, and sick the children were. Fortunately acidosis is going out of fashion. I do not suggest that any dietician would be guilty of anything as bad as that, but it is a warning of what may happen if training is inadequate.

One has to realize that, when the balance of diet is changed, it is most essential to have an inside knowledge of the social and other environments which have possibly made this balance a useful adaptation. One is reminded of that instance in Nauru where the people obtained their B vitamins from their home brewed toddy; when they were forbidden to have it, their babies began to die from vitamin B deficiency. When one interferes with food balance, one has to have a knowledge of the conditions which dictated this balance; that knowledge will come very largely from those people who have intimate contact with the eaters of food.

* The spelling of "dietician" used in the *Proceedings* has been that which appears to be preferred in the second edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. In future the alternative "dietitian" favoured by the British Dietetic Association will be adopted.

There is no possibility of carrying out the difficult work with any simplified ready reckoner about diet. We have had to part with the 19th century outlook which was wrong and inadequate very largely because it attempted too great a simplification. The objections were obvious; yet people chose to overlook them, and went on for years with a simplification which would not explain the facts. It was at variance with the fairly competent knowledge of the ordinary housewife. It would be a good thing if every dietician had to read the literature of the past. There is a book by one, Sir Henry Thompson (1885), which ran into four editions 60 years ago, in which he condemns the purchase of green vegetables by the poor as a wasteful luxury, that, at a time when it was already realized in this country that scurvy in infants really was scurvy and could be cured by appropriate diet. That was the result of over simplification.

At present there is an attempt at simplification by classifying foods as "body builders", "protective foods" and "workers and warmers". Take the body builders; the protein of yeast, by itself, is not a good protein for maintaining growth because it contains little methionine; the protein of white flour is defective because it contains little lysine; a mixture of the two is excellent for maintaining growth. Which is the "body builder"? It is rather like the question about Seidlitz powders: is it the blue packet or the white packet that makes the fizz? To play the part of practical adviser it is essential to keep pace with the whole of the science of nutrition with all its problems and uncertainties; there are no short cuts.

I do not know whether, in the course of training, one can say that it is possible to teach perspective, but it is a most essential thing that a dietician actually practising should know when it is necessary to compromise, or advisable to compromise, in the interests of cooking facilities and expense, and when it is necessary for the dietician to dig in her toes.

The future will bring a steadily growing demand for dieticians to hold posts which demand both knowledge and discretion.

REFERENCE

- Thompson, H. (1885). *Food and Feeding*. London and New York: Frederick Warne and Co.

The Training of Dieticians: The Current Position

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There are probably many conflicting definitions of the word dietician in the minds of members of this audience and, therefore, any who venture to express an opinion about the training for this occupation should indicate what they mean by the word. We must all agree that the dietician's work is concerned with the feeding of human beings, just as we presumably agree that a nurse's work is concerned with the care of the sick and the helpless. What we perhaps do not all agree about is the necessity for some standard or basic kind of training for the occupation of dietician, in much the same way as a basic training is necessary for a nurse or doctor or teacher.

It is widely recognized that the duties of dieticians are most varied, but