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Medical Officer of Health for Stockton-on-Tees
and **J. KIRBY, M.R.S.I.**

POVERTY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

A Considerable Proportion
of the Total Population of
English Men, Women & Children
haven't enough to eat.
That is the fact: this book
unmistakably proves it.

"I can heartily recommend this book to all
who desire to read reliable evidence concerning
a national problem of unsurpassed importance"

— from the Introduction by
Sir F. GOWLAND HOPKINS, O.M.
Professor in Bio-Chemistry, University of Cambridge

Figures published by the Ministry of National Service shortly after the termination of the Great War as to the extent of physical unfitness among the adult British male population disturbed the public conscience. This book traces the common defects there shown to exist in high proportion backwards through adolescence, childhood and infancy to their beginnings. By means of a series of carefully planned investigations extending over fifteen years some of the causal factors in the production of an A1 (or conversely a C3) populace are elucidated, and the preponderatingly important rôle played by Nutrition is clearly demonstrated. The fact that rehousing of a slum population in good environmental conditions may, if nutritional processes are interfered with, result in increased mortality, is shown to be the key to the elucidation of much which has, heretofore, been obscure in the theory and practice of Public Health. Study of minimum dietaries adequate to maintain health and working

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With a foreword by

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FOREWORD

THE PUBLIC CONSCIENCE is disturbed to-day by indications from many quarters that ill-health due to malnutrition is prevalent in this country. The many who desire to know the whole truth about the situation will welcome the noteworthy contribution to the evidence contained in this book. Its authors write with authority based upon knowledge acquired during many years of work in the public health service in industrial areas. This is a high qualification. It is, indeed, particularly to those thus qualified that the public must ultimately look for information and guidance. Laymen, medical practitioners, scientists and politicians alike, when seeking facts upon which action can be based, must, it seems to me, seek the help of those who, like Medical Officers of Health, are in closer contact with the realities of the situation.

In Part I of the book the authors review the statistical evidence concerning public health which is available in various published documents. They have ably analysed, for instance, the findings presented in the Report of the Ministry of National

Service, and the results of the routine medical examinations of school children carried out under arrangements made by Local Education Authorities, together with the more meticulous examinations meant to display the prevalence of specific defects. An illuminating discussion of the evidence thus made available is followed by an interesting review of data obtained a few years ago by the senior author from the reports of Child Welfare Centres in Stockton-on-Tees. It is rightly remarked that there have been too few attempts to make use of the last mentioned records.

Summing up the evidence yielded by studies of the kind so far mentioned, the authors conclude that it shows the existence of a high incidence of partially unrecorded physical defects in our population, and further that a dominant factor in the production of this state of affairs is nutritional in origin.

Chapter VII of the book is of special interest. It describes the results of a most profitable enterprise in which advantage was taken of exceptional local circumstances at Stockton-on-Tees. A few years ago, a population was transferred from slum dwellings to a modern self-contained housing estate, and kept intact without admixture with other populations; there was also a second comparable population that continued to dwell in slum houses and served as a

control. As the authors truly remark, such favourable circumstances for human field research rarely occur. The expenditure and the health of these populations were carefully compared, and interesting facts were brought to light in the comparison. The reader will find they were not altogether such as might have been expected. They leave, however, the impression that adequate nutrition may be more important than good housing, and they make clear the importance of the economic factor in the nutrition of families. The full significance of the latter is admirably illustrated in Part II of this book, which is in many ways of exceptional interest.

I have read no discussion elsewhere, dealing with family economics, which has demonstrated so convincingly how, with incomes near the poverty level, wholly unavoidable expenditure on items other than food may inevitably lead to ill nutrition. It is true that whatever sum can possibly be spared for food is almost always spent upon it; but, unfortunately, food is often the only budgetary item in which adjustments, even though unwelcome and undesirable, can be, and are, in practice, made. Many other items are much less elastic.

In these later chapters expenditure at different economic levels on fixed and inescapable necessities, such as rent, and a number of items which are here classified as "family overheads" is carefully

appraised, and its effect upon food purchasing power made clear.

Many points are brought out which do not always occur to those not in contact with the actual conditions of life at such levels; one may instance the serious hardships involved in the increased cost of fuel in winter, when the family's needs for food are at their highest. This last section of the book, indeed, is full of material significant for the expert, and of interest for the layman. The authors are clearly convinced that ill nutrition calling for remedial measures is widely spread. They make it very evident, moreover, that it is economical factors which control the situation, a conviction that all must acquire. It may be very difficult, as the authors, together with many others, have urged, to provide objective measures for degrees of malnutrition. When, however, we find that numerous families in this country can spend at the most only some sixty per cent. of what the most moderate estimates show they should spend upon food, we scarcely need further evidence for the existence of ill nutrition among us.

I can heartily recommend this book to all who desire to read reliable evidence concerning a national problem of unsurpassed importance.

F. GOWLAND HOPKINS

A BANKER'S DICTUM

MR. COLIN CAMPBELL, presiding at the annual meeting of the National Provincial Bank Ltd., on January 30th, 1936, at Southern House, Cannon Street, E.C., suggested that in order to fill the gap in our foreign trade the Government should improve the food of the under-nourished. He is reported as stating: "It has been suggested that in trying to stave off ruin from farmers, Governments have tended too much to regard the problem as one of reducing supply to fit the lower level of demand. If it were approached from another angle, and increased consumption were aimed at, this might be a more satisfactory way of spending funds now devoted to subsidies to producers or to export bounties. Our Government has already made a start through the provision of cheap milk, and it is stated that methods of extending such schemes to other sections of the population are being considered.

"It has been estimated that, if the under-nourished classes in this country were able to enjoy a full diet, there would be an increased trade in foodstuffs amounting to about £200,000,000 a year, giving revived activity to British farming without harming overseas trade or shipping."

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capacity and the costs thereof, together with consideration of the necessary domestic overhead charges, indicate that a considerable proportion of the population is, of necessity, subsisting below the safety line of adequate nutrition. Detailed consideration of family budgets at different income levels indicates a positive ratio between income and diet and, further, that the death-rate of a community is not unassociated with its income level. The social and economic implications of the data contained in this volume are far-reaching.

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