I

INTRODUCTORY

It is well understood by the public that at the present time a rigorous economy in food is not only desirable on general grounds, but absolutely necessary to the success of this country in the task before it.

While all may have the wish to economise, many will feel the need of some guidance with regard to the lines upon which economy may be practised without injury to health. Some such guidance this pamphlet is intended to supply.

A general economy in the use of food is clearly called for, since its practice will lead to what is now so greatly desirable, an appreciable increase in the current national savings. The country spends some £600,000,000 a year\(^1\) upon its food and a saving of one-tenth of this would be no mean item. But, further, since there is likely to be a serious shortage in particular foodstuffs, a wise course of economy will include a serious endeavour to substitute the more plentiful for the less plentiful foods. There exists, it is true, a consideration of importance which somewhat complicates the course of simple retrenchment; the necessity, namely, of giving first choice when possible to the foodstuffs which are produced at home, so that shipping tonnage may be reduced and our indebtedness to other countries grow no faster than is necessary during the remainder of the war. On this point the Government must give the public guidance from time to time.

Subject to the qualification just mentioned economy is clearly possible upon each of two lines. Less may be eaten, and foods which cost less may be substituted for those which

\(^1\) Calculated at the retail prices existing before the war.
cost more. But to each of these possible courses certain con-
siderations must be applied. It must be recognised, for example, 
that the first course, that of eating less, is not open to the whole 
nation. A proportion of the population, probably not less than 
a quarter of the whole, is already limited by the smallness 
of its earnings to the consumption of a minimum. But for a 
great number a lessened consumption of food (and especially of 
meat) is possible, and that without any danger to health. This 
applies in particular, as will be later pointed out, to those who 
in the present crisis are not called upon to do strenuous physical 
work, be it in the field or in the factory. For those to whom 
such work is allotted, and for growing children, the nation must 
endeavour at whatever cost to maintain a generous food supply. 
To the application of the second method of economy—that of 
consuming the cheaper rather than the dearer foodstuffs—there 
are of course certain limitations. It is clear, for instance, that 
if there were a greatly increased consumption of some one 
cheap foodstuff—say oatmeal for example—an increase in the 
price would check the economy attached to its use. On the 
other hand if the dearer forms of food were too rigidly avoided 
by those accustomed to consume them there would be a disloca-
tion of the market which (for a period at any rate) might lead 
to wastage rather than to economy. A careful consideration 
of the domestic budgets of different classes of the community 
would suggest the following possibilities. While the very poor 
cannot be expected to practise any appreciable economy at all, 
families in which the earning power reaches from 40s. to 50s. 
a week can economise by more careful marketing, and by the 
replacement of a certain proportion of dear foodstuffs by an 
equivalent quantity of cheaper forms. The well-paid artisan 
class and the lower middle classes can save by a similar replace-
ment carried out to a greater degree (and especially by lessening 
to some extent their consumption of meat), but also by an 
appreciable reduction in the total amount of food eaten. The 
well-to-do, without perhaps greatly altering the nature of what 
they eat, can increase their savings for national investment and 
conserve the supply of available foodstuffs by consuming con-
siderably less.
But to all classes, even to the wealthy, it is now more important than it would be under ordinary circumstances to watch the markets. If an article of food of which the price is falling (or rising but slowly) be purchased rather than a similar or comparable article of which the price is quickly rising, the supply and consumption of our various foodstuffs will be more equably adjusted, and this circumstance will in itself make for national economy.

But as we have said those who are prepared to make alterations in their consumption of food in order to conform with the urgent national needs of the moment may require information as to how far such alterations, whether of degree or of kind, can be made without danger to health and efficiency. Before presenting tables which are intended to show the relative cost of equivalent nutritive values when purchased in the form of different foods, we give therefore a brief account of the function of food in general and of the special importance of its individual constituents.

II

THE USES OF FOOD

THE TWO DISTINCT FUNCTIONS OF FOOD: (1) AS A SOURCE OF POWER, AND (2) AS MATERIAL FOR REPAIR

The human body, though doubtless, in many of its aspects, something more than a mere machine, resembles the steam-engine in two respects. It calls for a constant supply of fuel, and, as a result of doing work, it suffers wear and tear. The body must burn fuel in order that the heat which it is always giving off may be continuously replaced; and it must burn still more fuel whenever it does work. From this necessity there is no escape. The body must also undergo repair, and if it is to remain healthy, its repair must keep pace with the wear and tear which it daily suffers.