CHAPTER III

ABOUT FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

It is always interesting to visit a place where food of many kinds is for sale. People who live in the country are fortunate, for they can raise much of their own food; but they always enjoy going to the state and county fairs where food is on exhibition and prizes are given out for the biggest potatoes and pumpkins, the best bread and cake and jelly and preserves as well as for the best sheep and pigs and oxen. In the city there are often food fairs, and in the larger cities there are generally great market buildings where farmers can bring their produce, have the use of a stall, and sell directly to their customers. In many of the smaller cities the “market” consists of a great room or hall with many counters, and on these all kinds of food are placed, carefully protected by glass from dust and flies, but open to view, and with each counter given up to some one kind of food. These counters are skill-
fully arranged to induce customers to buy more than they intended, the meat and vegetables farthest from the entrance, because people will buy these anyway; and luxuries near the door, so people will be tempted by them when waiting for a car.

Such markets are arranged for the benefit of the seller; but one might be planned for the benefit of the buyer, not the buyer who merely wants "something good to eat," but the intelligent buyer who knows that each kind of food is of value for some special purpose.

Suppose there were such a market, or rather, a great food fair, larger than any fair that was ever held before, and that all the kinds of food that you ever saw were brought together so people could walk about and look and buy whatever they chose. They might find the food arranged in five great booths, so that each one contained the kinds of food that would do the same kinds of work in the body. In the first booth would be the fruits and vegetables, whose greatest value to us is in regulating the body. In the second would be milk, meat, cheese, and other foods that furnish protein, a very important building food. Milk is useful in so many other ways that it might almost be put in every booth. In the third there would be chiefly cereals, such as wheat, oats, and rye. These, too, contain protein, and they also contain much starch, the cheapest kind of body fuel. In the fourth booth would be sugar and different kinds of sweets, fuel foods that we like for their flavor. In the fifth booth would be
butter and bacon, oils, and other fats. These are important fuel foods and they also make our food taste good.

In a city small boys and girls are often sent to market to buy the food for the family. "They know what they are about," the clerks say, "and they get their money's worth." Imagine, then, some of these children with a market basket visiting each booth and selecting the day's food for their home.

At the first booth, they would find all the kinds of fruits and vegetables ever heard of. There would be apples, pears, plums, cherries, oranges, lemons, and pineapples, all the varieties of grapes that ever grew on vines and all the kinds of berries that ever grew on bushes—for in an imaginary fair like this there is no reason why there should not be fruit from every country and of every season. Of course there would also be plenty of dried fruit, such as figs, raisins, apricots, and prunes.

At the same booth, there would be vegetables of all kinds. Green corn and carrots, spinach, celery, salsify, lettuce, potatoes and sweet potatoes, onions, string beans, green peas, okra and cabbages, and all the other vegetables that ever grew in gardens or fields. There would be dried ones, too, for people are beginning to discover that they can dry vegetables as well as fruits, and if ever such a fair as this becomes a reality, there will be a great display of vegetables which will need nothing but water to make them ready to be
cooked for the table. Boxes of dried carrots or potatoes or peas do not look quite so warlike as a machine gun, but they, as well as the gun, have helped to win the war. The process of drying made it possible to preserve the products of our gardens and farms, and dried vegetables take up so little room and weigh so little that they can be carried across the ocean far more easily than fresh ones.

In these fruits and vegetables mineral matter is found, especially lime and iron. These mineral substances are necessary to all the processes going on in the body, and an important part of their work is helping to make bones and teeth. If you leave a bone in weak acid, such as vinegar, for a few days, the acid will eat most of the mineral matter out of it. The bone will look much the same, but if you take hold of it, you will find that it will bend almost like rubber and can actually be tied in a knot. This shows how bones behave if they do not have enough lime to keep them stiff. Children’s bones have a hard time in one way. They have not nearly so much mineral matter as those of grown folk, and therefore they are far more likely to be bent out of shape. If a little child walks before the bones of his legs contain enough mineral matter to strengthen them so they will hold up the weight of his body, he may become bow-legged. In another way, the bones of children have a great advantage. They do not break easily, and if one does break, it will soon knit, or grow together again, while if an
elderly person breaks a bone, it may never knit at all.

Mineral matter is often found in some one part of a fruit or a vegetable more than in other parts. In the potato, for instance, there is much of it in the layer next to the skin. This is why potatoes ought to be pared as thinly as possible or the baked skin eaten. In any case, to throw away thick potato parings and buy other starch and mineral food is behaving like the woman who paid one man ten cents a barrel to carry off her old fruit baskets and wooden boxes, and on the same day paid his brother ten cents a barrel to bring her bits of wood for kindlings.

Not only do the fruits and vegetables supply us with mineral matter, but they make our food more bulky, and this is an aid to good digestion. Fruits and vegetables are useful, too, in giving us water, and we need much water, more indeed than most people are accustomed to drink. Sixty pounds of the body of a ninety-pound child consists of water. This is passing out constantly through the breath, as you can see by breathing on a cold window pane, and through the tiny pores of the skin, but more in summer than in winter; and we need a large quantity to take its place. When you are thirsty, it is not only your throat, but your whole body, that is calling for water. There is no water in sugar, starch, or lard, but there is in almost all other kinds of food, even where one would hardly think of looking for it. In wheat flour, for
example, there is a good deal. If you should keep ten pounds of wheat flour in a warm oven for a while it would weigh a little less than nine pounds when you took it out. The lost pound was water, and it has evaporated. Any one can see, even without testing the statement, that there is much water in fruit and vegetables. Grapes are nearly four-fifths water, tomatoes and celery more than nine-tenths.

It is because fruit and vegetables contain so much water that they are difficult to transport, for not only do they spoil easily, but they are heavy and take up too much room. That is one reason why, in these days, when there is double work for every ship, we are asked to eat them as much as possible, so that the more concentrated foods may be sent abroad. Entirely aside from the needs of the countries that have been at war, however, they are an extremely valuable food.

In the old fairy tales, there was always one fairy who was forgotten and who made everything go wrong because she was not invited to go to the wedding or the christening. There is a class of substances called vitamines which are somewhat like the revengeful fairy. They are present in certain kinds of food in minute quantities. Little is known about the vitamines, but what is known is of the utmost importance, for it is certain that they are necessary to life and health. There are two kinds. A good deal of one kind is found in butter, the yolk of eggs, and in the leafy vegetables, such as lettuce, spinach, and dandelions. The other
kind is found in a great many kinds of food, especially
in vegetables, in fruit, and in whole cereals. Both are
found in milk. They, like the fairy, should never be
forgotten at the feast.

We know fairly well how much people should eat of
some kinds of food; but no one has as yet found out
just how much of the vitamins we need. One thing
is sure, namely, that fruits and vegetables which con-
tain them are a most valuable kind of food, and every-
body, except babies, should have at least one pound a
day. They are so largely water that there is very little
danger of any one’s eating too much of them, but in
any case, it is better to eat too much of these foods
than too little and the children with the market basket
can hardly buy too freely at this booth.

*It is worth remembering:*

**That the first of the five great groups is composed of fruit and vegetables.**

**That we need, especially for the making of teeth and bones, the mineral matter supplied by fruit and vegetables, and milk.**

**That if we use fruits and vegetables and milk freely we are quite sure to get enough of the vitamins that are needed to make us grow.**

**That fruit and vegetables also help to supply us with water, and add to our food the bulk which is needed in digestion.**

**That fresh fruit and vegetables are so hard to ship that we can help by using those that grow near home.**
Food material containing equal amounts of protein

1 quart milk

12 ounces bread

4 eggs

8 ounces medium-fat meat

8 ounces dried beans

4 ounces cheese