CHAPTER IV

FOODS THAT HELP BUILD THE BODY

After the children with the market basket have selected their fruit and vegetables they will next come to a booth filled with eatables which look as if they had never seen one another before and were surprised to find themselves in the same company. Some are in bottles, some in jars or in their own natural shells, some are in wooden boxes or cartons and rattle around whenever they are stirred, and some stand out boldly in all sorts of shapes, ready to be sliced and sold. Perhaps you have guessed that the bottles hold milk, that the jars and shells hold oysters and clams, that the boxes and cartons hold dried beans and peas and nuts, and that the food all ready to be sliced off is great pieces of meat—beef, mutton, pork, veal, and other kinds. Besides these, there are eggs, cheese, and fish.

It is certainly a queer collection at this second booth, for eggs and oysters, or pork and nuts, or beans and
cheese, have not often much to do with each other. In one respect, however, all these foods are alike; namely, they all contain a good deal of a substance called protein. It is by no means easy to extract the mineral matter from fruit and vegetables, but it is a simple matter for any one to get protein. If you live in the country, go to a wheat field, pick some grains of ripe wheat and chew them. They will soon become a gummy, elastic mass; and this is one kind of protein. If you live in a city, far away from fields of wheat, make a stiff dough of some flour and work it with your fingers in a dish of water or under a gentle trickle from a faucet until the starch is washed out; and what remains of the dough is the same kind of protein as that obtained from the wheat kernels. Aside from the water in them, lean meat, cottage cheese and the white of egg are almost entirely protein. Dried beans and peas, peanuts and lentils, although really vegetables, contain so much that they belong in this group. The soy bean, which first came to us from Japan and China, and is now raised in large quantities in America, is more than one-third protein. Fish contains almost as much as meat, while milk and cheese are the best protein foods we have.

The chief business of protein is to supply material for growth and repair. A child who does not have as much protein as he needs will become stunted. The body of a grown person does not increase in height like that of a child, but it is subject to constant wear and
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tear, and if there were no way to replace what has been worn out, it would not take so very long for an active person to use up his body. A boy who goes barefooted all summer does not wear out the soles of his feet, or rather, what he does wear off is replaced; but he would wear out more than one pair of shoes if he gave them the same treatment that he gave his feet. Shoes wear out, but feet are kept in repair by the body.

Protein is an absolutely necessary food. This is what gives it its name, for the word protein means of the first importance. Unluckily, most people make the mistake of thinking that in order to get protein food they must buy meat; and as meat is usually expensive, they spend much more money in buying it than is at all necessary. If they only knew that cheese and eggs and milk, as well as fish and other seafoods, will take the place of meat altogether, and that beans, peas, and nuts will do a great deal toward filling its place, they would come home from market with fuller purses.

There is one thing that the children with the market basket should remember when they stand before the protein booth—that not all proteins which the foods provide are alike. Some come from animals and some from vegetables. Some can supply all the protein needs of the body, some only part of them. That is why, if we eat milk, cheese, eggs, or fish, we can do without meat altogether; but if we depend upon beans and peas, we need some milk, or eggs, or meat besides.
Fish is an excellent substitute for meat; but it is a pity that we have so many whims and prejudices about it, and fancy that a new kind of fish cannot be good because we have never heard of it before. If you make a list of the kinds of fish that you are accustomed to eat, you will find it a very short one, and yet there are at least seventy kinds of salt water fish and thirty of fresh water fish that we might be using as food. A number of these that we do not know are fully as good as those that we are accustomed to eating. Besides this we have salted, and dried, and canned fish. Many other countries use much more fish than we. We eat on an average only about one-third of a pound a week each, and most of us eat it only one day a week. Canadians average more than one pound, and English people average one and one-fourth pounds. It is foolish and narrow minded to be afraid to try new kinds.

Milk is one of the best protein foods we have, the very best for children. People often think of milk as a drink rather than a food because it is a liquid; but they ought to learn that a glass of milk has as much protein as a large egg or one and one-third ounces of meat.

Many people look upon milk as merely a luxury, and therefore they are ready to strike it out of their fare if its price rises. It is a pity that they do not understand how necessary a food milk is. Compared with other protein foods it is not expensive. Do you know that when milk is fifteen cents a quart and eggs sixty cents a dozen, a quarter of a dollar will buy more
protein in the form of milk than in that of eggs, and as much as in beef at thirty-five cents a pound? Milk, too, contains fat and sugar and other things that the body needs. It is a better source of lime than any other food, besides containing the substances called vitamins that we have just begun to know about. Every boy and girl ought to have at least a pint of milk a day, and every child under six should use a quart, while grown people should have some every day. Buy milk and save money is a good slogan for the housekeeper.

Even in skim milk and in buttermilk most of the protein and milk sugar and the greater part of the lime of the whole milk are found. Cottage cheese, even when made of skim milk, is a good substitute for meat. American cheese, too, may be used in place of meat, and has one advantage over milk in that it is not so bulky. A cube of cheese measuring one and one-fourth inches will furnish about as much protein as a glass of milk. Unluckily, we are not very sensible in our use of cheese. We ought to remember that it is one of the hearty foods and eat it in place of other protein foods instead of when we have already had enough.

Four large eggs contain about an ounce of protein, and so does a quart of milk, or half a cup of cottage cheese, or one and three-fourths cups of baked beans, or one-third of a pound of meat. Certainly, there is no monotony in protein foods and every taste ought to be suited with one or another of them. When the house-
keeper goes to buy protein foods, however, she must remember that from day to day her family will need variety, and that some of her daily supply of protein should always come from milk.

A wise man has said that no family should buy meat until at least a pint of milk has been bought for each member.

*It is worth remembering:*

- That protein is found in a great variety of food, both animal and vegetable.
- That protein supplies food for growth and repair; and that it is therefore of the first importance.
- That there are different kinds of protein and that we need a variety, unless we get enough of the one best kind of protein food, milk.
- That meat is not necessary if we use the right foods in its place.
- That we ought to use more fish and to learn to know more varieties.
- That to buy milk is a cheap way to get protein.
- That every child needs milk each day.