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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, November 13, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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This week's letter from Washington, D. C., tells about a young woman, a food economist from the Department of Agriculture who is now on her way to Geneva, Switzerland, to aid the League of Nations in its work for better world nutrition, and a chart that that she is carrying with her.

Writes our Washington correspondent: "When workers at the Bureau of Home Economics began their study of adequate diets that fit the income of different families, they had no idea that in a few brief years the young woman in charge of that study would be invited to cross the Atlantic and go to Geneva as nutrition expert for the health section of Lord Astor's League of Nations' committee. But that is what has happened. Dr. Hazel Stiebeling has just sailed to spend three months abroad advising on world nutrition problems. And she has taken with her a chart, the first of its sort ever compiled in any country -- a chart showing how much American families spend for food and how these various typical diets rate in food value, how they check in vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrates and fat that human bodies need. This chart may serve as a pattern for other countries where the Government is interested in learning about the nutrition of its citizens in order to improve public health and welfare. The chart is a summary of the findings of the recent consumer-purchases study which several agencies of our Government cooperated in making and which was supervised by the Bureau of Home Economics.

"But Dr. Stiebeling's invitation to aid the League of Nations dates back farther than this -- back to 1930 when she first worked out simple, understandable and practical directions for adequate diets on very little money for farm families of the South who were suffering from a serious drought. Later as the depression came on, she worked out diets for impoverished city children that would cost even less, yet would save them from the serious malnutrition they were threatened with. And this led to the publication of one of the most widely known Government leaflets - called 'Diets at Four Levels of Nutritive Content and Cost.'

"It was this information, the first of its sort ever published, that drew the attention of Lord Astor's committee which was concerned with the relation of nutrition to health, agriculture and economic policy in the various nations of the world. When this committee began its study of world nutrition problems, it stated the problem thus: 'While owners of food stocks were unable to find remunerative markets, some parts of the world were suffering from famine; in others, large sections were suffering from malnutrition. This malnutrition, moreover, was not confined to the poorest classes.'

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"Then, when the committee published its 327-page report on world nutrition, it gave many a picture showing how much of the world is in need of nutritional help. It reported that every nation on this food-filled globe has undernourished population. Even in the countries where the record is best, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and western Europe, plenty of malnutrition exists. Pellagra is still a problem in the southern States of the United States, because of poor food habits. Mortality rates in the depressed districts of South Wales are 166 percent above those of well-to-do districts. About 80 percent of the deciduous teeth of British children are imperfectly developed. Even in Australia typical malnutrition among children exists. An Australian nutrition council stated: 'The pale, puffy, even slightly overweight child with continual colds and chronic bronchitis, came to be such a familiar type that it could be recognized as it came through the door.' A far worse situation was reported of central and western Europe where 'frequently the consumption of meat in peasant households is restricted to one pig per year which is slaughtered at Christmas.'

"The hopeful side of the picture brought out by the Astor committee was that food habits are subject to change and that these changes show up quickly for better or for worse. During the World War when food was used for the army and the civilians at home existed on small rations, the change was for the worse. In Germany it turned out a stunted crop of war children. Berlin children born in 1918 who entered school in 1935 were 2 to 2 and a half inches smaller and 2 to 3 pounds lighter than those entering school a few years before. On the other hand, food habits of many of the Western nations are improving. The past century has seen English, German and American life spans growing longer and the average stature of young Swedes, Danes, Norwegians and American university students increasing as a result of better nutrition and public health. The Committee also finds that the food habits of all Western countries have changed greatly since the World War, chiefly in the larger amounts of vegetables consumed the year around.

"This change, the Committee says, is 'no accident'. The 2 main reasons for it are, first, that the machines have taken many jobs formerly done by strong muscles so workers have less craving for energy-producing foods and more for lighter fruits and vegetables; and, second, that widespread nutrition teaching has given much importance to green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and other protective foods including milk and eggs.

"As for what Dr. Stiebeling's chart shows about the food habits of this country, I'll tell you just the high points, so to speak, today, and then write the details in another letter. This chart shows a small, all-black section, indicating those families which in general had so little to spend that food could not be adequate. Then there is a small all-white section of families spending so much for food that all had well-balanced meals. In between was a stretch of diets, good, bad and indifferent, indicating American families, who, if they knew how and cared to plan adequate diets, could have them on the same amount of money that they were spending for inadequate diets.

"As I said, I'll be writing you more about that chart another day."

That concludes this week's news letter from Washington, D. C.
