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GOOD LUNCHEONS
FOR RURAL SCHOOLS
WITHOUT A KITCHEN

By ELLEN H. RICHARDS



WHITCOMB & BARROWS, BOSTON, MASS.

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GOOD LUNCHEONS FOR RURAL SCHOOLS WITHOUT A KITCHEN

THERE has been much hesitation on the part of even the most ardent advocates of economics as a public school study, because of the expense involved in the fittings that are found in the large schools in the cities, with gas and running water. But if, as we believe, conditions have so changed as to make it imperative that "the woman who spends" should know something of marketable products, the pupils of the rural schools need the opportunity to gain this knowledge just as much as those living in the cities need it. Indeed, from the efforts making to revive village industries and to discover new uses for the materials going to waste in every country town, it is easy to see the opportunity of the consolidated school where food, textiles, and industries may be studied, with illustrations, where inspiration may be given and received, and a new center of influence developed.

Suggestion will bear abundant fruit if made at the age when impressions are permanent.

This recommendation is no plea for fads and frills, taking time better spent. It is no argument for undue form or ceremony, but a plain statement of the use of that degree of orderliness and system

which affects favorably the human mind as seen in the pleasure derived from orderly processions and balanced arrangements.

To be specific, the luncheon taken to school may be good and sufficient food, but if crushed—jam mingled with cookies, butter squeezed over the doughnuts—if eaten with chalky fingers on the schoolhouse doorsteps in company with flies, the additional charm of appetite is frequently wanting.

The latest science gives us warrant for paying attention to ceremony and the surroundings of a meal, since they affect the beneficial flow of the digestive juices. Because a child lives in the country and goes to a country school is no reason why that child should have boorish manners or eat in a piggish way. Too much ceremony costs time and money, but a little is good for both digestion and manners.

The noon hour in these schools should be utilized for social training and the acquirement of good habits and refined tastes, instead of being worse than wasted, as is at present too often the case. One evil-minded pupil turned loose in a rural school may demoralize the whole community. Rough games and horse play or sitting on a bench on the shady side of the schoolhouse are not the ideal recreations. Let there be a helpful supervision of the occupations of the noon hour, by a person provided by the local woman's club, if there is no other way, and have both boys and girls taught what to eat and how to eat it, and how to take care of the refuse, all in a spirit of

enjoyment, not drudgery. (The school grounds will afford outdoor amusement in the same way.)

The consolidated school, where most of the children stay for luncheon, offers the opportunity for having an orderly half hour for eating. Each child may bring his own luncheon, of course, and the first difficulty will arise in the secretiveness and shame of those who have what is termed coarser food, or whose mothers do not take time to provide carefully. This is, however, not insuperable, and in time tact and patience will draw in all the pupils.

There should be a table tastefully laid, with flowers or fruit in the center, on the paper cloth, and certain common dishes disposed about. At each place may be a plate, of paper perhaps, with a round or square of paraffin paper under it to protect it — set on one of the pretty and inexpensive doilies — a mug or cup or glass, and a fork. A group of four or five pupils should be told off each day to prepare the table, and there should be competition and possibly a prize to the group gaining the best results in the least time. Another group may prepare one common dish to cost not over the one or two cents which each child pays daily for candy. This will be an appetizer for the luncheon brought from home. This dish should be one of those which has been discussed and prepared several times in the course of the lessons on food and nutrition, which it is the right of every child to have in its school course.

At the present time a sufficient number of good

meals to serve all the purposes of illustration may be served without a kitchen. How?

First, many good foods are picked from vines or trees in condition to eat, with the power of the sun and wind and rain still in them. Kernels of wheat shaken from the head have been eaten from time immemorial, as have apples picked from the tree. The strongest, most agile animal, the squirrel, lives on nuts. Man may add to these from overflowing markets many other fruits (oranges, bananas), many green vegetables (lettuce, tomatoes), and with butter, cream, cheese, eggs, and milk may make up a most delicious and nutritious diet.

If to all the foods picked ready to eat there are added those prepared on a large scale and taken from packages instead of from trees, it will be seen how rich a variety is possible. The prepared cereals, crackers, zwiebach, wafers, biscuit of all varieties, cassava bread, rice wafers, puffed rice, popped corn — there is a large supply at hand. The fine quality of canned fruits and vegetables obtainable make it quite unnecessary for a rural school to fit up a kitchen in order to teach food values and bills of fare.

The experience of most country children is that the pleasure of a meal is marred by the drudgery of cooking beforehand and of washing the greasy dishes afterward. Eliminate the dishwashing and a great gain is made. Teach the rinsing of dishes used for milk and the plunging of all others that are not

greasy into cold water. Rounds may be cut from paraffin paper to place the food on in the plates, and this paper be burned after using. Paper plates may be used instead of china, only they must be burned after a time, after being handled, although it is a good lesson to see that the children's hands are clean before they touch food or dishes. Here is where the need of hot water comes in, and no school-house should be without it. It is a simple matter to have a small kerosene stove or a chafing dish (and this can be used for cooking eggs on the spot, for heating milk in cold weather, even to make cocoa); laundry heaters are not expensive nor troublesome to run. Even if the children bring their own lunches it is the only safe and decent thing to see that there are hot water and soap and towels. The last they can bring from home.

There is no need for a school to wait for even the kerosene stove in order to secure a kettle of hot water or pail of cocoa or soup or stew. The hay box or fireless cooker will solve the problem. It only means a box with packing — hay, old pillows, even sawdust — into which the kettle or pail is put after having become boiling hot and for meats kept hot for fifteen minutes. The larger the quantity the better it holds the heat. Less than one gallon needs careful and abundant packing, and in very cold weather or for long distance transportation it is well to warm the packing by a pail of water, which is taken out as the food goes in. Many appetizing

dishes may thus be prepared and sent with the children to school to cook and keep hot until luncheon. Mothers may take turns in making up their favorite dishes. It will be an excellent lesson in economical preparation.

There must be some psychological reason why nearly all children detest fats, or, quite as likely, we are wrong in expecting them to eat crude fat; nuts and cream are a more agreeable form. Also the operations of cooking in the home are lengthy, and hours seem days to children. On the other hand, children as nearly universally delight in laying a table, putting on the food effectively, and in putting things back into place. There is usually an innate sense of order which may be fostered. If, therefore, the two disagreeable and time-consuming portions of meal serving can be eliminated a great gain will have been made.

Let us see what may be done by a teacher in a rural school.

As to food. It has been found out that man's food always contains five distinct classes of substances. First, water, either by itself, as from well or spring or tap, or in milk or fruit (the apple and the orange have some 80 per cent in the edible portion) or vegetables (the potato has 75 per cent); meat also, 70 to 80 per cent. Children need one or two quarts a day. Second, mineral salts, of which most natural foods have enough. Only foods which have been separated from their natural forms, like

white flour and sugar and butter, need to have some substance—salt, for instance—added to them or eaten at the same meal.

This leaves three classes to consider in selecting our foods. (1) Proteid (from a Greek word meaning first) is of first importance, because such substances, always containing nitrogen, are in some unknown way necessary to life. Again, all natural food materials, as fruits, nuts, milk, meat, and vegetables, contain nitrogen. Some are richer than others, and therefore these synonyms must be learned, for nothing can replace these nitrogenous compounds.

(2) Fats. Children will soon learn that we do not mean only greasy or solid lumps of meat fat by this term, but that nuts, corn meal, oatmeal, olives, etc, contain a pleasant form, as do milk, cheese, and butter. Fat in this sense is second only to proteids as essential to life.

(3) Starches and sugars, of which there are so many that a term, "carbohydrates," has been chosen to cover them all. These are most abundant and cheapest, and hence form the largest bulk of human food (cereals, crackers, bread, sugar, potatoes, bananas).

For each meal it is well to have all kinds, so that the little cells of which the body is made may find just what they need as the blood stream flows by them. Then for breakfast we may have fruit of any kind, fresh or dried, any of the cereals with milk or cream (not sugar), which gives us fat and starch, with

sugar in the milk — the best kind. Or we may have crackers or bread and butter with cheese. A beaten egg will give more nitrogen if it is needed. A banana may take the place of bread or cereals.

For dinner it is well to have more hearty food. Instead of meat, nuts or cheese or eggs may be eaten if they have not been used for breakfast. There are so many good foods that it is not necessary to have the same thing three times a day. For older people salads come here, with the rich olive oil; nuts, apples, celery, fruits, etc.

For dessert, fruits, especially the hearty dried fruits — raisins, figs, dates — and a little pure white candy or chocolate.

For supper or school luncheon it ought to be possible always to have plenty of clean, sweet milk, and there is no better food, when it is clean and sweet, than two glasses of milk with bread or crackers. There is now variety enough in crackers and biscuits for every day in the month. As a pleasant addition, some one of the dried fruits, or some jam or jelly, different from any used before in the day, may be used, but the children's supper should be of two or three things only.

It is not difficult to adapt illustrations of well-balanced meals to local conditions, to use foods of equal value, to make up deficiencies in one food with small additions of another, as the rice-eating peoples use fish roe.

In the use of language for expression of ideas,

not only the right word for the idea, but also synonymous words with a like or similar meaning, those which carry delicate shades of feeling, are desired to add variety and force to speech and writing. So in food it is desirable, not only to have food of the right composition, but to have a choice of *food synonyms* which are nearly enough alike to be substituted one for the other, as taste and convenience dictate. This is one of the chief lessons to be learned in school, and which often cannot be learned at home. It will save time and money and be most beneficial to health to get these few facts before all school children. If no set time is allowed, it may be taught incidentally in connection with the school luncheon as here described.

The application to the school luncheon of these principles, which have been explained by the teacher, will be by easy stages, one thing at a time, and chiefly by stimulating interest on the part of the children. Charts of food composition on the wall will give a basis for further study. Let the figures or, better, lines representing proportions impress themselves on the children's minds. Mere didactic instruction will not accomplish much.

From "the true history of one country cooking school," as related by the teacher, the following extract is made:

"The school committee and the teacher discussed the possibility of preparing warm lunches, the children doing the actual work, the teacher serving as

buyer and steward. There are three objects in this — the health of the children, their instruction in cooking, and also such instruction in table manners as might be given without hurting their pride or feelings.

“The teacher estimated that a bill of fare for one warm dish each noon could be provided at a cost of two cents a child, each bringing in addition bread and butter. Arrangements were to be made that children who had not the pennies could pay for their dinners by doing some work for the teacher — the other pupils knowing nothing of this arrangement.

“Ready money is scarce with farmers, even as little as two cents a day for a goodly family; but milk and vegetables are plenty, and farmers are generous according to their means, and they often sent offerings, which made the expense less for the experiment. . . .

“Each child brought two napkins, a knife, fork, spoon, plate, cup and saucer. This was the introduction of some of them to napkins. Two napkins were needed, because each child had to use his desk as a table, and tables must have tablecloths.

“The equipments were given by various persons. The committeeman sent a kerosene stove with oven, which would not bake at all unless placed over one of the stoves that served to heat the room. . . . The other articles of household utility were half a dozen dish wipers, two dishcloths, mixing pan, dish pan, spider, frying pan, large kettle, big spoon, boxes for

salt, pepper, flour, and some groceries that were kept on hand. The boys made a convenient cupboard for these and another for the dishes, and doors on them kept out the dust. . . .

“It took some planning to arrange the work so that lessons should not suffer nor be interfered with by the necessity for the cook’s presence at the stove, but certain regulations soon worked themselves out. Unless a girl had her lessons she could not serve as cook, and there were others always glad to serve in her stead. . . . The cooking force consisted of one big girl, who ought to know something, and three helpers. This force was changed each week. The week’s bill of fare was given to the big girl, whose duty it was to see that everything was prepared before ten minutes of nine, that the room was neat, that the food was put on the stove at a proper hour, served properly, the dishes washed, and all tidied again. No vegetables were peeled during school hours, nor other work of that order allowed to come in study hours. . . .

“The cooking done by these children between eight and fourteen years was a revelation to the teacher, who had seen some of that done by their elders.

“To the objection that air in a schoolroom is bad, and food cooked therein must be unappetizing, there is only one reply — a country school can have all the fresh air needed — and this school did. . . .

“A small expenditure of money will fit any school

for the cooking lessons which are practical for that school. Interest and zeal on the part of teacher and pupils will make the work successful under difficulties, and often children learn more when things are not made too easy for them. Economy in use of time and materials, neatness, attention to one's work, regardless of that of others, are good lessons to learn, and they will all come to the country school where cooking is taught, even without a modern improvement."

The overworked teacher cannot be expected to give thought and time to such oversight in her short rest hour, and the taxpayers will not at first see the advantage to their pockets in providing extra help; but the field is open to the woman's club of the town, and offers to them an example of cooperation, a subject of study in perfecting details of management which they will be able to cope with as circumstances demand. No more interesting work and surely no more profitable occupation could be found for the talent now lying idle or wastefully used in every town in the land.





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