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The Economics of Consumption

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flowers or leaves and berries. Good vases of pottery and lustre or brass or copper bowls have a decorative value when placed on table mantle or bookcase, with or without flowers, and a colorful glass bowl with flanking candle sticks of glass, wood, or brass, holding brilliant candles would turn many a dull spot into a place of beauty.

Do not be afraid of color when used in small amounts; as accents it cannot be too brilliant. Whatever your color scheme may be follow it consistently with an eye to contrast as well as to harmony. Rooms are often far too neutral in tone. Lamps placed where light is needed will add so much to comfort and happiness of effect that we wonder why we have tolerated the fixture with unshaded lights hanging from the center of the room so long. Have numerous base receptacles and floor outlets in your rooms, put one wherever you think a light might be needed; they may all be attached to the switch at the entrance door if thought desirable or turned on separately as needed. Lovely lamps may be made from pottery or metal jars from candlesticks fitted with new bulbs instead of candles or they may be found in infinite variety in the shops. Sidelights which look like old colonial lamps or double brackets, with or without candles, of wrought iron, silver or brass, or with very fine overhead lights in dining rooms, narrow halls, kitchen, pantry and entrance halls for convenience. In bed rooms there a light dropped just in front of the bureau and the dressing table finished with shades of silk to match the draperies, one of these should be connected to the switch at the entrance door. These two lights with a base receptacle for a reading lamp at bedside would be sufficient for most bedrooms. A bracket light with long chain on pull socket, placed over the head of the bed, on sleeping porch or in bed rooms, solves the reading light problem where wall space is limited. Japanese lanterns of varnished cloth make very good fixtures for certain rooms. Mirrors carefully placed have a decorative value and will increase the light when hung in rooms with north windows or with windows under arch. The ideal number of the colonial and Italian mirrors are ideal for hanging over fireplaces, or in small rooms they seem to add space.

The ideal house is the small one with lamps and lights by the yard. A so-called family rooms have a partition removed so as to have at least one room of good size. A room irregular in shape will often furnish more interestingly than a rectangular one of the same area.

Remember, when furnishing, that Rome is not the only worth-while thing which has needed many days for building. And also, never feel discouraged on account of small means. Ingenuity will make a much more livable house than money spent without thought.

The Economics of Consumption

By JOHN E. BRINDLEY, Professor and Head of Economic Science

In the brief space and time at his disposal, the writer can do little more than state a few of the most important problems connected with a subject of such magnitude and complexity as the Economics of Consumption. In its relation to fundamental economic theories of production, distribution, and exchange; in its vital connection with almost numberless special economic and social problems such as wages and working conditions, standards of living and family budgets, poverty, unemployment and crime, immigration and tariff legislation, and in the wide and varied utility and in its dependence upon numerous technical studies of food, clothing and other utilities that minister directly to the wants of man—consumption is at once the tangible bond and motive force of the present economic order. Man, as a consumer of economic goods and services—and we all must be consumers—is the end and aim of all the economic activity involved in the production, distribution and exchange of wealth. On the ancient theory, labor, the consumer's capital, once shall be last served, consumption has received scant attention aside from its general recognition as one of the classical divisions of economic science. With the rapid growth of colleges of home economics for the scientific study of the highly technical aspects of the problem, a more complete development of Economics of Consumption is certain to follow.

First of all the reader should have a clear idea of the meaning of consumption of one of the principal divisions of economic sciences. Consumption is the use of economic goods or services in the direct satisfaction of human wants. So-called productive consumption is therefore not consumer and all but depreciation, which is an important technical aspect of the subject of production itself. To the retailer, food, clothing and the waiter's supply of coal are production goods, not consumption goods. As a creator of place and time utilities, the retailer is a producer, performing as he does the last step in the frequently long process of production. To the consumer, food, clothing, and the waiter's supply of coal are consumption goods, and should be so treated in a study of consumption as contrasted with production. Consumption is therefore a point of view—the point of view of the consumer in the direct satisfaction of his wants.

A second fact, which should be stated in this connection is the value of consumption goods in the United States and the relative increase per capita of this class of goods. King, in his very scholarly work on "Wealth and Income of The People of The United States" estimates that the total value of consumption goods increased from $2,317,060,000 in 1850 to $23,576,000,000 in 1910, a per capita increase during the same period from $72.00 to $234.00. While the figures are not given, it may reasonably be assumed that, measured in dollars at base, the total and per capita increase since 1910 has been very great. Two points stand out in these data as especially significant: first, the vast magnitude of the problem of consumption, quantitatively expressed; and the fact that, contrary to the economic pessimism of Marthus, the supply of consumption goods has increased more rapidly than the population. When we take into consideration the fact that production goods have increased far more rapidly still, we can form some idea of the rapid progress of economic society from the point of view both of living conditions and capital goods—the result of the industrial revolution based upon the unparalleled advancement of pure and applied science.

In the third place, standards of living, family budgets and closely allied problems should be dealt with. The consumer's budget is more comprehensive and scientific manner than has been done in the past. Such works as Comish, "The Standard of Living," some papers of Professor Nystrom, "The Economics of Retailing," and Bulletin Number 7 of the Bureau of Applied Economics entitled "Standards of Living" represent good beginnings along this line. The family budget, however, has real meaning only to the extent that it is based upon and properly related to highly technical studies of human wants. In the fourth place, no problems can be more important than a real practical knowledge of those living conditions, which, in the last analysis, determine our efficiency, health, and happiness.

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highly technical knowledge brings us to the fourth consideration or point of view in this brief paper. Bulletin Number 7 noted above at page 1 states:

"It has been estimated that the number of calories needed by a man at moderately hard muscular work is 3,500 to 3,800 per day. This amount of food per man per day in order to insure sufficient variety and quantity, both as to bulk and calorie content. If the housewife is a dietetic genius, 3,500 calories per man per day purchased in the market may be a liberal allowance."

The budget studies and elaborate tables that follow are based on the above statement of food requirements—the so-called Voit standard of Munich, Germany. The Voit diet for a man doing moderately hard muscular work is 118 grams of protein or albuminous food, 56 grams of fat and 500 grams of carbohydrates, such as sugar and starch, with a total fuel value of 3,500 calories or 3,800 calories per day. Atwater, however, is inclined to place the daily protein requirement at 125 grams, with sufficient fat and carbohydrates to equal a total fuel value of 3,500 large calories for a man doing a moderate amount of work. For a man doing hard work Atwater would increase the daily diet to 150 grams of protein with fat and carbohydrates to equal a total fuel value of 4500 large calories. These figures are taken from the writings of Professor Russell H. Chittenden, Director of the Scientific School at Yale University, an eminent authority on problems of human nutrition, as the writer does not assume to possess any great technical knowledge in this special field, except that, in his own case, no such bountiful food standard is necessary, desirable, or even possible, a fact which may or may not conform to the averages—the only scientific and therefore safe point of view in matters so important to the general welfare of the race.

The reader, however, will be interested in the statements of Professor Chittenden of Yale regarding the above standards, which are in part as follows:

"Suppose, on the other hand, that we have in these figures false standards or in other words, that the quantities of foodstuffs called for are altogether larger than the actual demands of the body require. Then there is a serious waste of valuable food material which we may calculate in dollars and cents; a loss of income incurred daily which might be expended more profitably in other directions. To the wage-earner with a large family, who must of necessity husband his resources, there is in our hypothesis a suggestion of material gain not to be disregarded. The money thus saved might be expended for the education of children, for the purchase of household treasures tending to elevate the moral and mental state of the occupants, or in many other ways that the imagination can easily supply."

Again the same careful student of nutrition thus writes:

"There is today great need for a thorough understanding of the laws of nutrition which constitute the foundation of good living. It is a subject full of interest and promise for the sociologist and economist, as well as for the psychologist. We need a far more complete knowledge than we possess at present of the laws governing nutrition; we need fuller knowledge of the methods by which the most complete, satisfactory, and economical utilization of the diet can be obtained. Further, we need more concise information as to the effect of the mental state upon digestion and nutrition. These and many other problems of a like nature confront us when we attempt to trace the influence of a proper nutrition upon the condition of the body. These problems, however, all admit of solution, and in their solution undoubtedly lies the remedy for many of our present ills and handicaps."

Finally Professor Chittenden, as a general conclusion of his book "Physiological Economy in Nutrition" makes the following significant statement:

"Restricting our conclusions to general statements, we may say that our results, obtained with a great diversity of subjects, justify the conviction that the minimal protein requirement of the healthy man under ordinary conditions of life is far below the generally accepted dietary standards, and far below the amounts called for by the acquired taste of the average American. Expressed in different language, the amount of protein or albuminous food needed daily for the actual physiological wants of the body is not more than one-half that ordinarily consumed by the average man. Body-weight (when once adjusted to the normal level), health, strength, mental and physical vigor, and endurance can be maintained with at least one-half of the protein food ordinarily consumed; a kind of physiological economy which, if once entered upon intelligently, entails no hardship and gives an unanswerable bettterment of the physical condition of the body. It holds out the promise of greater physical strength, increased endurance, greater efficiency of body and mind, and a condition of well-being that is full of suggestion for the betterment of health."

Physiological economy in nutrition means temperance, and not prohibition. It means full freedom of choice in the selection of food. It is not cereal diet nor vegetarianism, but it is the judicious application of scientific truth to the art of living, in which man is called upon to apply to himself that same care and judgment in the protection of his bodily machinery that the mechanic applies to the mechanical products of his skill and creative power.

Food requirements must of necessity vary with changing conditions, but with due recognition of this fundamental principle, all the results so far obtained in this investigation, with a great variety of persons, point to the conclusion that the real demands of the body for protein food do not exceed fifty per cent of the amount generally consumed. One-half of the 118 grams of protein food called for by the Official standards is quite sufficient to meet all the real physiological needs of the body, certainly under ordinary conditions of life; and it is most important that every person not leading an active out-of-doors life, even smaller amounts will suffice. Excess means waste, but of far greater importance is it that the excess of food so placed upon the body by this uncalculated excess of food material, which must be gotten rid of at the expense of energy that might better be conserved for more useful purposes.

Further, the total consumption of food by the average individual, non-nitrogenous, is considerably greater than the requirements of the body demand, although here we must give closer heed to the varying requirements of the body incident to varying degrees of activity. The man whose work is purely mental has no real need for high fuel values in his daily ration. For such a man, a high potential energy in the daily intake of food is an asset and not a gain. On the contrary, we have a large laboring population working on far less than 3000 calories per day by the brain worker, and in the interest of health, strength and vigor, as well as scientific truth, why teach the doctrine that a healthy man needs, on an average, foodstuffs to furnish 3000 calories or more per day, with 16 to 18 grams of nitrogen in the form of protein? Moreover, as our experiments have clearly indicated, even the man who is called upon to perform considerable physical work has no apparent need for a fuel value in his food of 3000 calories per day."

If the eminent Yale authority on nutrition is correct or even approximately correct, it means billions of dollars of economic waste annually in the United States, and a consequent loss in physical, moral, educational, and social efficiency which appals the imagination. Much is being said these days by our agricultural economists regarding the waste of farm production and the marketing of farm products and justly so. Secretary Hoover is now stressing the awful waste in industry, and that this waste to the high cost of living is receiving serious and much deserved attention.

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tention. All production has for its ultimate goal consumption as defined in this paper; and yet consumption is the least understood and therefore the least developed of any of the classical divisions of economic science. When the real facts are better understood, and, with competent women highly trained in economic science and the technical problems of home economics, these facts will be well understood. The writer is of the opinion that the so-called waste of production great and important as it is, will be found to have nothing on the waste of consumption.

In the meantime the producer of food need not be alarmed over the effect of a more economic nutrition on the demand for agricultural products. Changes along this line will be very gradual, in fact almost imperceptible, requiring long periods of time for their realization. Pending these changes, population will increase and social and economic adjustments will take place. There is and can be no fundamental conflict between the laws of production and the laws of consumption.

In conclusion, such problems as clothing, proper housing and living conditions generally, consumers' marketing as contrasted with producer's marketing, and different systems of retailing can only be mentioned. If one goes to the local store to buy a yard of cloth, he is told that it is all wool and a yard wide. He knows that it is a yard wide because we have proper standards of weights and measures enforced by law. He does not always know that if he purchased the same article in the same store, he would be sent a yard of cloth that is all wool, which would be the case if he purchased the same article in London for the reason that Congress has not yet enacted proper legislation as to the marking and branding of textiles.

For a number of years the writer has been convinced that, from a broad economic and social standpoint, economic science as related to the technical problems of home economics—the Economics of Consumption, is equally important, if not the most important part of our specialized technical field, and this, in spite of the fact that it is the least developed at present. Colleges and schools of home economics, however, have now reached a stage in their technical development where a broader economic and social outlook on the world and its many complex problems is not only desirable but imperative. We are at last in a position to take up in a thorough scientific manner the point of view so ably suggested in some of its aspects by the late Simon N. Patten in his monograph 'The Consumption of Wealth,' written more than twenty years ago.

Professor F. N. Carver, one of our leading economists, believes that a wise selection of foods for the table would reduce the cost of food about one half, a saving over and above what would also be possible if Professor Chittenden's statements are correct as outlined above. Referring to the economics of consumption and the vast problems involved, Professor Carver, in his "Principles of Political Economy" on page 499 thus writes: "Here is a real Armageddon, the battle-field of the nations—the place for the ultimate contest for supremacy among the various races and nations of the earth. This is the field where every nation in the world must sooner or later be brought to the test and made to battle for its very existence. It is a peaceful contest, but none the less deadly on that account. Preparedness for this final and ultimate conflict will consist in the study of standards of living and the adoption of such standards and habits as will increase productive efficiency to the maximum and reduce the cost of living to the lowest point which is consistent with maximum productivity. In the interest of this form of preparedness it will be well for us to ponder the advice of Pythagoras to his son: 'Choose those habits which are best; custom will make them the most agreeable.'"

On Our Street
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