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No. 2584

<i>The Protein Problem of China</i> : DR. WILLIAM H. ADOLPH	1	<i>Raw Hen Egg White and the Role of Iron in Growth Inhibition of Shigella Dysenteriae, Staphylococcus Aureus, Escherichia Coli and Saccharomyces Cerevisiae</i> : DR. ARTHUR L. SCHADE and LEONA CAROLINE. <i>An Oxidative Metabolite of Pyridoxine in Human Urine</i> : JESSE W. HUFF and DR. WM. A. PERLZWEIG	13
<i>Obituary</i> : <i>Archie Scott Woods</i> : DR. GEORGE J. HEUER. <i>Lester S. Guss</i> : DEAN G. L. BROWN	4	<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods</i> : <i>A Manometric Valve or Respirator</i> : DR. A. CANTOR	16
<i>Scientific Events</i> : <i>A College of Chemical Engineering at São Paulo; Dedication of an Equipment Museum at the Medical Field Service School; Officers of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers; The American Geophysical Union</i>	5	<i>Science News</i>	10
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	7	<i>Index to Volume XCIX</i>	i
<i>Discussion</i> : <i>Variants in Fungi</i> : DR. ROBERT A. STEINBERG. <i>Bacteriostatic and Fungistatic Action of Some Organic Chemicals</i> : T. M. EASTWOOD. <i>Education in Argentina</i> : DR. J. A. SHELLENBERGER	10	SCIENCE: A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science. Editorial communications should be sent to the editors of SCIENCE, Lancaster, Pa. Published every Friday by	
<i>Scientific Books</i> : <i>Chromosomes and Phylogeny</i> : DR. ERNST MAYR. <i>Synthetic Rubber</i> : DR. E. L. KROPA	11	THE SCIENCE PRESS Lancaster, Pennsylvania	
<i>Special Articles</i> : <i>Aggregation in Solution of a Synthetic Hapten</i> : PROFESSOR WILLIAM C. BOYD and JANE BEHNKE.		Annual Subscription, \$6.00 Single Copies, 15 Cts.	

THE PROTEIN PROBLEM OF CHINA¹

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PROTEIN INTAKE

THE protein problem of China implicates the nutrition problem of China as a whole. Our experience in the Far East leads us to believe that in normal times the question of sufficient calories usually takes care of itself. That is to say, in a closed area or in a large agricultural country undisturbed by much industry, when the population pressure is in equilibrium with the food supply, it would appear that people live or die, depending upon whether the supply of calories is sufficient or not. This is one reason incidentally why the problem of nutrition in China is such a fascinating one for the food economist; the equilibrium is such a simple straightforward equilibrium with very few side reactions. But aside from calories the question of protein is probably the first qualitative factor

¹Paper presented at a Symposium on the Biological Value of Proteins, at the Cleveland Meeting of the American Chemical Society, April 6, 1944.

of importance. Our first set of data published about twenty years ago indicates a protein intake of approximately 80 grams per capita per day,² which figure subsequent studies have confirmed as an average statement of the protein intake.

THE RURAL DIET IS VEGETARIAN

A further accounting shows that about 95 per cent. of this average protein intake is derived from vegetable sources, while 5 per cent. is animal protein. One should hasten to explain that these figures are for the Chinese rural diet, which accounts for some 85 to 90 per cent. of the total population of the country. Please keep in mind that those who live in the more sophisticated centers, including those citizens of China whom we meet on the college campuses of this country, are accustomed to a dietary which approximates in character and variety that of the Occident.

²W. H. Adolph, *Jour. Home Econ.*, 17: 1, 1925.

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