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Dear Friends:

I believe I thanked you, but certainly not sufficiently or properly, for the time you gave me last year in my preparation of a memorial address to the American College of Cardiology. The lecture was a pleasure to give and was well received and I have enjoyed using it for medical audiences since. It has, however, not been put to paper! Even my anthropology colleagues here at the University found it not entirely unreasonable as an addition to our own epidemiological evidence on diet and activity in peasant farmers.

I write you now because of the correspondence I've had in recent times with David Pilbeam and your responsibility for the dietary aspects of FROM researches. I am sorry to have missed your recent bash in Baltimore where it would have been good to take up our acquaintance. This letter is simply to let you know that I continue my interest, my amateur explorations in the literature, and conversations.

This is also to let you know that I would be happy to join you if my particular epidemiological, nutritional and public health approaches would make any contribution to your deliberations. Parenthetically, I have tried to think how some of these issues might appeal to NIH Study Sections including the one on which I sit, Epidemiology and Disease Control. This musing has not so far been productive.

The enclosed represents my recent efforts to summarize the epidemiological evidence on diet and population levels of serum lipids and atherosclerosis. In it, the hunter-gatherer data have significant public health implications. The amusing thing about this conference was that the two other reports, from the disciplines of clinical investigation and experimental pathology, based on totally separate deliberations, arrived at the same conclusions about optimal blood lipids for man as did my group summarizing the field work of nutritional epidemiologists and our own studies in rural peasant populations. The whole monograph is a useful summary but I send you only my section.

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March 25, 1980
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I've also had informal discussions on the possibility of a thrifty gene concept of survival value in lipoprotein synthesis, say for the rapid neural growth of the fetus and infant, resulting in an excess of LDL cholesterol, (the apparent villain in atherosclerosis) in times of plenty and in cultures of abundance. So far it doesn't tie together quite as well as it does for obesity and insulin secretion.

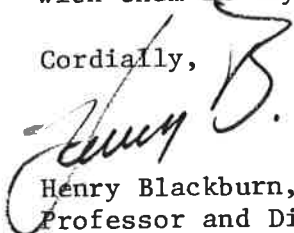
With respect to testing such far out but attractive theories, you may be interested in the work of a young colleague and protege, Michael Stern at the University of Texas-San Antonio, who is in a real sense testing the thrifty gene hypothesis by measuring the effect of acculturation. The Mexican-American phenotype of obesity, glucose intolerance and hypertryglyceridemia may evolve to what I call the "supermarket phenotype" which is predominantly characterized by hypercholesterolemia, perhaps as a function of acculturation to American patterns of diet composition, over and above abundant calories.

Finally, I had looked forward to summarizing the anthropological, epidemiological and sociological aspects of some of these issues in a visit this summer to South Africa where I'm invited to advise its government on prevention programs. I planned to spend three weeks with them, then a week in the caves, and if lucky, to visit with Willem's group among the Bushmen, where I have a contact. I also hoped to take up Richard Leakey's invitation to stop by Nairobi on the way home.

This delightful prospect is totally thrown over by our receipt this week of a major NIH grant for a quasi-experimental community demonstration program and having to almost double the size and output of my Laboratory within the next six months.

I am copying you on a recent letter to Eric Ross and hope something materializes there. At any rate, I did want you to know of my continued interest, my desire for conversation and communication with you on your undertakings, my desire to forward them, and to collaborate with them in any way possible in a modest and amateur capacity.

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor and Director

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