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*HB - Controversy!
New Puritans
review -*

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Dr. Cortez F. Enloe, Jr., Editor
NUTRITION TODAY
111 Chinquapin Round Road
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Dr. Enloe:

Having been for years an admirer of the work of Dr. Passmore of Edinburgh and respectful of his quantitative science, it was a shock to be exposed to his remarkable personal prejudices in the March/April issue. By his labelling as "New Puritans" the many thoughtful scientists and physicians who over the years have weighed the evidence and made the best recommendations possible for the public health, Professor Passmore engages in the blatant moralism which he decries in others. Such labelling, also as enthusiasts, of serious and thoughtful clinicians, scientists and public health experts who, in over 20 nations over the last 20 years, have made recommendations he decries is as inappropriate as it is unfair and unprofessional. Equating "our traditional diet" in the U.K. and his sensual pleasure consuming it since childhood, with good nutrition for all of the present and future and with a scientific base for that diet, is incorrect and misleading. Diet and patterns of eating and changing traditions rarely evolve from thoughtful scientific policy.

"I have no sympathy with these new Puritans who would diminish our enjoyment of eating." Such a tradition of rampant hedonism may be appropriate to an old crocheted from Scotland but I'm sure it is inappropriate to public policy. ". . . All of these foods are good for us when eaten in moderation and the appropriate circumstances." Professor Passmore should be the first to recognize that "moderation and appropriate circumstances" are not quantitative values or scientifically based. "All things in moderation," is neither a scientific prescription or rational public health recommendation. "Moderation and appropriate circumstances" are totally an individual matter and in large part culturally determined. Moderation to Dr. Passmore would be nauseating to much of the human race which eats so differently from him.

Professor Passmore's description is most romantic of childhood with his father and his father's medical care of the local preacher, and the rich nostalgia for "shepherd's pie and home cured ham from a fat pig," these foods do not acquire healthy properties simply by association with Dr. Passmore's childhood. What he maintains in the face of evidence has nothing to do with good nutrition, but has only to do with his personal, socially learned criteria for pleasure.

We wonder that such a distinguished figure of science should consider the following as good nutritional advice for anyone:

"I think my father was well informed on feeding children and as far as possible I still eat the same types of foods as I enjoyed as a child."

To bolster the credibility of this amazing bias, Dr. Passmore cites the ever increasing sales now into the 9th edition of his text, Human Nutrition and Dietetics, that is somehow related to his editorial opinions being correct for all and all time.

To bolster further his credibility he indicates that he is "there has been little or no change in dietary advice to healthy people" throughout the 8th editions of his book! And further "wise general practitioners give the same dietary advice as my father did and this differs little from that given by Hippocrates." Thus, the ultimate authority is cited. We would be grateful to Dr. Passmore for the citations from Hippocrates, though one would not care to live by them without reasonable consonance with current science. I have recently sought through all of Hippocrates Aphorisms and can find no general hygienic advice anywhere for the well population. Hippocrates was a model for the modern high-technology-biased academic physician. Advice on "a healthy mind in healthy body" must come from Greek mythology, it certainly doesn't come from Father Hippocrates.

Finally Dr. Passmore states: "We all know [in our hearts] that meat, milk, butter, eggs, sugar, salt and wine, taken in moderation, are good for everyone." Yet Dr. Passmore was neither moralistic or scientific enough to define moderation. He can hardly expect that we accept his prescription as good for everyone, or for that matter, for anyone, since his prescription to us is quite undefined, and immoderate in other cultures.

It is quite remarkable that a medical figure of the stature of Dr. Passmore would not attempt a rational review of the evidence, reject it if he chose and give real reasons for his rejection, rather than labelling the evidence and others interpretations of it as follows:

"The most publicized claim of the Puritans is that reducing dietary fat, especially animal fat, will reduce the risk of coronary heart disease."

He then gives us a distorted interpretation of the evidence concerning the relationship of plasma cholesterol level and coronary heart disease and creates a threshold level of importance, at 220 mg/dl or 5.4 millimoles below which cholesterol is important. He goes on to mislead us with the statement: "there is no evidence that lowering the level of plasma cholesterol in individuals in whom it is below the threshold level is a benefit." This is a classic example of applying individual evidence inappropriately to population-wide recommendations. Dr. Passmore may not recognize the difference between individual risk and prescriptions and population risk and public health recommendations. Until this is understood and these recommendations separated, Dr. Passmore will lead us astray.

He then goes on to reverse himself in saying that "it is prudent for each one of us to moderate our intake of animal fats." What is moderation? Again, he cites history" . . . Fatty meats, whole milk, and butter; foods that have been appreci-

ated for their flavor as products of good living since history was first written." Unfortunately, Dr. Passmore regards the period of written history as the acme of humankind in respect of health and good nutrition. It should be obvious that humankind thrived as a species in a hunter-gatherer lifestyle long before history and that this lifestyle has its stamp in evolutionary genetics and our legacy. All these foods are accoutrements of modern agriculture and civilization and have nothing to do with the human evolutionary legacy. fatty meats, whole milk and butter were certainly not consumed by hunter-gathers, our evolutionary forebears.

Dr. Passmore then engages in an ill-informed and misleading discussion of the effect of dietary cholesterol. He apparently fails to understand that the effect of dietary cholesterol depends on the diet with which it is eaten and the absolute level consumed. Most people could indeed eat or add two eggs a day to their diet in the U.K. without a very large effect on their plasma total cholesterol levels or LDL levels. This population is already on the high plateau of the relationship of dietary cholesterol and plasma cholesterol level.

Dr. Passmore inappropriately presents an analysis of the strong population correlations between salt intake and blood pressure levels but misinterprets entirely the low order correlations often found between individual blood pressure levels and individual salt intake, within relatively homogeneous high salting cultures. Rather than attempting to resolve this "controversy" he simply highlights it: "As a recent correspondence in Lancet shows, there is much division of opinion as to whether high intake of salt predisposes to hypertension"! Dr. Passmore suggests that 12 grams of salt a day is "over double needed for physiological requirements." That is technically correct but is misleading in that it is six or ten times the physiological requirement. Finally, we are asked to absorb a total mythology "it is possible, even probable, that a salt intake above physiological requirements in some unexplained way contributes to well being." These are views of a distinguished scientist? He states: "Food manufacturers use large amounts of salt. Their customers like it and it is the original food preservative." What has this to do with physiological requirements or appropriate public health recommendations? If recommendations are totally based on customer's "likes" (social learning), unhealthy manufacturing processes or an "original form of preservation" which is no longer required, where indeed did the change come about that "manufacturers of formula milk and infant foods insure a low sodium content in all their products." This was only made as a result of pressures from the scientific community. The manufacturers did not do it out of scientific evidence they had developed or out of the goodness of their hearts. With Dr. Passmore's laissez faire attitudes, I'm sure, providers would likely continue to add salt to infant foods for the sake of pleasing the mother's socially conditioned taste.

How fortunate most of us are that we don't have Dr. Passmore's boyhood hero, the Cricketeer, Jack Hobbs "who lived to a good age and during his retirement enjoyed a glass of champagne with his friend every morning. I commend this habit and for this reason am doubtful of the wisdom of recommending the price of drink be raised as a deterrent to alcohol." Dr. Passmore should resign from all future public health and personal health recommendations. With this his credibility is severely in shreds. Finally, Dr. Passmore's antiquated sexual preferences are only exceeded by his peculiar science, I quote: "most of the huge army of would-be slimmers, 1/4 to 1/3 of the population, are better described as

plump than as obese." This from one of the best known quantitative characterizers of body mass and energy balance! He goes on irrelevantly and unbelievable with these sexual preferences: "the plump are not less healthy than thin though they have an increased risk of developing obesity. Most of them do not need to reduce!" Now we no longer have to accept Dr. Passmore, or Hippocrates, as an authority for good health. Instead we may go "to the National Gallery in Edinburgh and look at Titian's Venus, his model the plump lass. Who would want her any different!", he says?

Finally, Dr. Passmore becomes less vague and more specific and personal in his attack on the new "Puritans and enthusiasts" "who include the authors of NACNE report." This is at the very least unseemly in a well-known nutritional scientist. He closes his editorial as follows: "But a knowledge of nutrients is not necessary in order to feed well. I know people, including some doctors, who would be happier and more relaxed if they had never heard of polyunsaturated fats, cholesterol or vitamins."! "If you enjoy your food, than in all probability you're in good health"! Who in this remarkable essay is the enthusiast, who the moralist, and who is the scientist?

Sincerely,

Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor and Director

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