

Editorials

THE NUTRITION OF BRITISH CHILDREN

THERE can be few fields of human enquiry more prolific of fact and fancy, failure and frustration, than that of nutrition—except perhaps those of longevity and the perfect golf-swing. Educated predictions are frequently found to be wrong, or when they are right, they are right for the wrong reasons: they thrive who have no right—the *sans culottes* of the back streets are so often seen to be bursting with rude health—whilst those who are fed to a scrupulous formula from birth may be unimpressive and puny. As the late Hector Cameron was wont to teach his students at Guy's, “the healthy baby will thrive on gin and shrimps: the unhealthy will not thrive on anything—so don't bother too much about ‘infant feeding’.”

A survey of children's nutrition in 1963¹, from the harsh northern scrub to the lush southern stockbroker-belt, shows these difficulties in stark relief. As was predictable, there was more anaemia among the children in social Group V than in social Group I—but no significant decrease in iron or meat intake. Obese children were not guilty of eating more sugar; those who showed angular stomatitis were by no means deficient in riboflavine, nor did those who were recorded as thin or very thin ingest fewer calories than their fellows. In the whole exercise no overt deficiency disease was found, and indeed, evidence of significant malnutrition was completely lacking.

A more recent and quite fascinating survey² was conducted among school-children in Worthing—what do they eat for breakfast? Of 627 children, 91 per cent had either a ‘cooked’ or a cereal breakfast. Of this number only 42 had no breakfast at all, and it is surely significant that all of these were female and over 13, and 30 of them were obese—and knew it. The influence of the glossy magazine is evident here, and who could deny that it is in this case beneficent? Of the ‘cooked’ breakfasts, boiled eggs were the strong favourite, followed, strangely enough, by that gastronomic enormity, scrambled eggs, with the traditional bacon and eggs a bad third. How odd that baked beans should have been chosen by only four children—does advertising pay?

By and large it is clear that malnutrition among British children is hard to find, and that Mum is doing her job; and that, compared

with the great *majority* of the world's children, ours are living a life of Lucullian plenty. There is not the slightest guarantee, of course, that this will last for ever.

REFERENCES

1. *A pilot survey of the nutrition of young children.* (1963). London. Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
 2. Lowry, Audrey (1968). *Med. Offr.* **120**, 133.
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THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE annual general meeting of the College is held on the Saturday nearest to 19 November, the day on which the College was founded. This year it falls on the 16 November. This event is the climax of the year's work of the College.

At the annual general meeting the Council for the ensuing year is elected, the year's work is reviewed and policy is decided upon. The James Mackenzie lecture is delivered in the morning and this year the lecturer is Lord Amulree, the nephew of the late Sir James Mackenzie and he will be able to give personal recollections of his uncle. On these occasions we see the College as it were in conclave, on 'founders' day', and members can then meet each other and exchange views. The cocktail party at 14 Princes Gate at the conclusion of the meeting is a particularly happy institution. The weekend concludes with a symposium in the Wellcome Institute. All those who can spare the time from their practices should make a special effort to attend both the annual general meeting and the symposium.

This year the symposium is to be on *The evaluation of the quality of medical care in Britain—Problems and methods*. Amongst the distinguished speakers will be Professors R. F. L. Logan and P. Alwyn Smith and Drs D. L. Crombie, *O.B.E.* and J. A. S. Forman. Members may have received notice of these arrangements before this *Journal* reaches them. Early application for admission is advised as accommodation is limited.
