

Back to our Nutritional Future

Or...

Polar Bears in the Sahara

In reflecting on the past
Reviewing knowledge we've amassed
One would rightly be aghast

If the only salient gist
Were the lessons we had missed
Or implications we resist.

For it's clear that we've progressed
And in the process have addressed
At least for nations of the West

Every nutrient we need
To optimize our feed
For the welfare of the breed.

But come to "have" when once "had
not"
I think it's clear we've overshot,
In fact, by quite a lot!

So the challenge that emerges
As our culture clearly verges
On the brink of several scourges

(Diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke
Disease and demise about which we
spoke.)

Is related to excess:
Can we manage to suppress
The menace mingled with success?

Having looked where we've been
now where will we go?

In what way sort out
what we do and don't know...

In what way apply all the lessons we've
learned
Insofar as nutritional health is
concerned?

Consider that traits with which we've
been endowed
Are what cycles of feast and famine
allowed

That it's from our struggle to survive
Our dietary preferences derive.

Both what we ate, and how acquired
Our roles defined, our tastes inspired.

Now as for taste, we learned to favor
Food not only full of flavor

But rich, familiar and imbued
With nutrients so that when chewed

Through deprivation and subsistence
It nourished our resolved persistence

Both forefathers and foremothers
When they could indulge their druthers

Sought out what they could to eat
That rich and fatty, salty, sweet...

Brought strength and health, improved
condition
While preventing malnutrition.

**{THIS SECTION IS GENERALLY
OMMITTED FOR THE SAKE OF
TIME:**

Now as for food defining roles...
Ah, there's a rub this tale extols!

Here's where differences of sex
May vex and bother or perplex.

For men look back upon the hunt
With reverence and regret

And long for all the manly things
Like meat, and beer and sweat...

And since no man has hunted cheese
Nor beat an egg in battle

A quiche lacks certain attributes
more evident in cattle.

So it's been said that quiche for men
Is not the way to go

If it doesn't come with antlers,
Real men should just say no!

But men no less than women
Are ruled by appetite

So after they have just said "no"
Most men say, "well, I might..."

Then men have gone and eaten quiche
Where they found space to hide

Then wiped the crumbs, composed
themselves
And emphatically denied.

So who eats quiche? Well, anyone
By gender undissuaded

It's needing to confess to it that gets men
agitated.

For we think quiche quite a dainty dish
For ladies on a diet

So to save their reputations,
Of course "real" men deny it!

But in fact, a standard slice of quiche
Not especially thin nor thick

Is a load of fat and calories
About as dainty as a brick!

All our efforts to restrain ourselves
And be a bit ascetic

Are often at best marginal
And at their worst, pathetic

For our cravings from the early days
Are not readily refuted

So when we change our diets
With new dishes substituted

We tend to reapproximate our previous
condition

With abundant sugar, salt and fat our
diet's composition

For it is to traits and tendencies through
time assimilated

That the things we like to chew on now
are apt to be related.

So if tonight at dinner
You're not certain what to do

Be certain that the rest of us
Are in a muddle, too!

For choosing food is influenced
By taste, and health, and bias

And what the one would have us choose
The others would deny us.

END OF OMITTED SECTION}

Now, it may seem the winter
of our discontent
Insofar as our acts of ingestion are spent

But this notion of seasons
May shed some light

If not heat, on our current
Nutritional plight

As we ponder the ways
We all struggle with food

We may dare to be hopeful
Optimism renewed

If our thoughts turn to bears
Who live well to the North

With far too much sense
To dare venture forth

For to turn to the South
Would be foolish and bold

For such creatures adapted
To living in cold

The South and its heat
Is no place for such bears

With their layers of fat
And hide covered with hairs

And especially deserts
With blistering heat

Where the wind scorches skin
And the sand burns your feet

Is to creatures evolved
To climes that are polar

As appealing as a dentist
Extracting your molar!

These bears- so efficient
At heat conservation

Remain where they should
For their own preservation

And thus, unintended
Teach us a lesson

As we sip Coca-Cola
Munch chips fried in Wesson

Recline on a couch
Stay fixed to our seat

A lesson having nothing
To do with the heat

If bears have a home
Then so, too, do we

It's just that the bears' home
Is simpler to see

For the bounds of our home
Have been stretched 'til they snapped

'Til this concept of home
Can't be charted or mapped

We have claimed all the space
on the face of the globe

Yet borders beyond which
It hurts us to probe

Continue to bind us
Against all predilection

To the constraints of our history,
And natural selection.

Our home is the place
We're adapted to be

From the time our ancestors
climbed down from their tree.

In that place we're at home
we were always kinetic

due to struggles persistent
and even frenetic

looking always for food
finding barely enough

made us tough and get going
for the going was tough.

the work of our muscles
that kept us alive

drove up needs for fuel
to subsist and survive

so such food as we found
as we gathered and wandered

was cherished with nothing
wasted or squandered

perhaps that's the reason why
mothers berate

us for leaving residual food
on our plate

the food of our ancestors
caloric dilution

provided for micronutrient
needs a solution

for plants contain limited
combustible fuel

but are vitamin and mineral rich
as a rule.

We found very little of sugar and salt
so these are flavors we tend to exalt

the food we procured was largely fat-
free

although richer than ours in omega-3

We are told now to cut back
On sugar and fat

Restrict salt, as for fiber,
To eat more of that-

Eat more micronutrients
Less calories

Less food that walks
And more grown on trees

Avoid fatty acids
Saturated and trans

Include fish or
Flaxseed in all menu plans

More folate, potassium
And vitamin E

Selenium, zinc,
Flavonoids found in tea...

The insights it seems
Of our research and science

All converge to support
Systematic compliance

With a diet spelled out
Not in journals or tomes

But recorded quite nicely
By our chromosomes.

Like Hawthorne's hapless heroine
We too are marked from birth

By all the ways our bodies
Are adapted to this earth.

A constant rain of calories
Is not by birth our right...

So now against these wrongs
We've wrought, we're all compelled to
fight.

But there are ways, when there is will, to
get from this to that.

And shield our health within a shell of
native habitat.

We need that shell to shield us not just
from sun and rain; but from the flood of
calories that feeds the weight we gain!

Like polar bears burning beneath
Desert heat

We're out of our bounds
With the things that we eat

Our adaptations are challenged
Our shrewdness on trial

Will we find our way home
Or stay lost in denial?

As we look forward, think what to do
next
The past holds the answers in native
context:

polar bears, zebras, giraffes and baboons
don't ever sip tea, and never use spoons

yet while saying nothing
they tell us far more

about how to eat well
than fad diets galore

the brazen claims of Atkins,
Agatston & Sears
Lie not along the way to eat
That's stood the test of years

to promote healthful diets
be not beguiled-

put your ear to the past;
heed the call of the wild!

Ladies & gentlemen-
For our sea of dietary troubles
This displaced creature is an emblem.
But we are much smarter than the
average bear-
& unified against these rising tides of
tribulation, we may, by opposing, end
them!

So it is that I conclude this half-baked
talk on health and food; and do so
hoping to have taught. Or served, at
least, some food for thought!

-fin

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