

EDITORIAL : VAN DIE REDAKSIE

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE FAT WRESTLERS

In a recent philosophical thesis in which, on epidemiological and evolutionary grounds, Cleave and Campbell¹ seek to ascribe in a unitarian fashion the diseases of civilization to the disproportionate ingestion of refined carbohydrate, they comment very fully on the role of exercise and its supposed relationship to the presence or absence of obesity. A glance at any wild creature in its natural environment shows that no matter how plentiful its food supply, it never eats too much of it. Even a poulterer's shop reveals that no wild rabbit ever ate too much grass, no wood-pigeon ever ate too much wheat and no herring ever ate too much plankton. No wild creature in fact is ever overweight. Those of us who are too prone to forget that man is indeed an animal, should also remember that humans living in tribal conditions on unrefined foods are almost invariably not fat, however much they eat.

Cleave and Campbell¹ distinguish between two sorts of lack of exercise—the voluntary lack and the imposed lack. People who use lifts in office buildings and go home by car are generally those who do *not want* to climb stairs or those who do not want to go walking, and the writers mentioned above believe that it is quite fallacious to ascribe obesity to these instincts, pointing out that throughout the whole animal kingdom, few living creatures, unless forced to do so in order to get food, ever take more exercise than they want to take. Nature obviously likes to conserve the heart, and certainly never inflicts on any organism the penalty of obesity for laziness under natural conditions.

Elsewhere in the animal kingdom, as long as food is not tampered with, imposed lack of exercise seldom induces obesity, as is shown by a visit to any zoo. Here the natural exercise has been enormously reduced, e.g. the two opposite poles of creation—a large carnivore, like a tiger, accustomed to hunt its prey over many miles of jungle, and a small bird, like a finch, accustomed to fly about many acres of countryside—both of whom are now confined to comparatively small spaces; yet because each of the creatures continues to take its food in its natural form, their weight remains the same and obesity does not occur. Exceptions to these rules appear to exist in the fattening up of animals and birds for market, but closer examination will always show in these circumstances that food concentrates had been given, or that the animal is of a kind that has been evolved by selective breeding over many centuries to become much fatter than its wild counterpart.

The analogy of the Strasbourg goose was seen, many generations ago, in the remarkable ladies of the chiefs of the Bugandan courts, who were force-fed with milk through a reed and became so fat that they could not walk and had to slither around in the Seraglio like seals. Strangely enough, parallel to these young ladies, today we have the remarkable instance of the Japanese Sumo wrestlers. In this sport the participant must be enormous,

and a tremendous girth with massive corpulence is essential for the successful Sumo wrestler. Iwasaki² has described fully his experiences as Director of the Sumo Clinic in Tokyo, where he has studied 877 such people.

Before admission all applicants must be at least 5 ft. 8 in. tall and 165 lb. in weight, and as time passes they grow very much heavier. There are seven grades or divisions according to proficiency, and the weight of the wrestler rises slowly until he enters the third from the top of these divisions when it starts to rise rapidly. It is interesting to note that on reaching this stage the wrestler is freed from his earlier miscellaneous tasks and duties of serving the higher grade wrestlers, having lower grade people now to attend to him, and to take care of his various personal services; thus at the same time as he has less to do, he develops a feeling of satisfaction as well as peace of mind and relaxation. On entering the second stage from the top the wrestlers are massive.

These wrestlers develop their huge bodies by eating a basic daily average intake of about 5,000 calories of a special stew or hash which is rich in protein and calories and consists mostly of fish and other seafood and vegetables. This is a simple dish whose food value changes with the season and with local products. The wrestlers eat no fats, eggs, milk or fruit, and their food shows a 'definite deficiency of vitamins, calcium, phosphorus and iron'.² In addition to this basal 5,000 calories, they usually buy extra food with their own money: thus the figure of 5,000 calories can be regarded as a conservative minimum estimate.

The wrestler only has two meals a day, he rises early and practice begins at 6.30 a.m. Some 70-80 men participate in five hours of practice, and this means that each wrestler actually engages in practice for only a few minutes. Following this he takes a leisurely bath and then has his first meal of the day in which most of the 5,000 basic calories are eaten; after this he has a sleep; thus, when compared with other sports, the amount of active practice by each individual is negligible. The effect of both these factors is to result in a large gain in weight and a massive corpulence. As they become seniors in their profession almost every single one of them develops diabetes, the disease coming on in direct proportion to the seniority of the grade to which the wrestler belongs. Interestingly enough, the largest emergence occurs when they reduce their physical activities most sharply, particularly when they retire from active competition and become officials of the association. Furthermore, any temporary cessation of their usual exercise owing to injuries or other causes, sharply increases the onset of diabetes. Here, the glycosuria is dispelled by return to their usual exertions and has been referred to as 'temporal', a term that might be more accurate, than as amusing as it appears at first sight! Thus, in this unusual instance of pugilistic 'Billy Bunterism' associated with enormous food intake, even the cessation

of the small amount of exercise taken, results in a rapid onset of diabetes in many of these cases. The next commonest condition from which they suffer is a spinal spondylosis.

It would be intriguing to see a complete breakdown of the food intake of these people with special respect to the extra food bought with their own wages to see whether they, like other people in Japan, in addition to this huge basic caloric daily intake, also consume large quantities of

refined carbohydrate in the form of sugar.

These people contrast strangely with the Pondo cane cutters in Natal who also have a massive caloric intake (about 5,000 calories) yet whose physique is magnificent, and in whom obesity is absent. A good cutter will cut, trash, and move for 50-100 yards, up to seven tons of cane per day.

1. Cleave, T. L. and Campbell, G. D. (1966): *Diabetes, Coronary Thrombosis and the Saccharine Disease*, 1st ed., p. 58. Bristol: John Wright.
2. Iwasaki, I. (1966): *Science and Technology in Japan*, 4 July, p. 62.

DIE NOODSAAKLIKHEID VAN VRYE TYD

Soos dit spreekwoordelik waar is dat die arbeider sy loon waardig is, is dit ook waar dat hy sy rus waardig is. Die behoefte aan 'n tydjie wat hy net aan homself kan bestee is seker net so oud soos die mens self. Die psalmdigter van ouds het reeds al gesê: „Ek wil dink aan my snarespel in die nag, wil peins saam met my hart, en my gees deurvors.”

In die gedurige gang en gemaal van die moderne lewe is dit seker nog meer waar as in die verlede dat die behoud en bestending van ons geestelike welsyn nie verseker kan word as ons nie sorg dat daar soms kort tydjes is wanneer ons weer 'n bietjie tot nadenke en rus en besinking kan kom nie.

Elkeen weet hoe 'n mens met die verloop van tyd naderhand moeg word van die werk waarmee hy besig is, al is die werk ook hoë interessant. Die menslike organisme is nou eenmaal so gemaak dat hy goed funksioneer *in skofte*. Daarom word ons moeg. Dit is die waarskuwing van die natuur dat die kragte laag loop en weer aangevul moet word. Daarom word ons ook vaak en slaap ons. Dit is die manier waarop die natuur ons liggaamlike en geesteskragte weer aansuiwer en vernuwe.

Hierdie oorwegings geld veral die besige geneesheer omdat sy werk dikwels van so 'n aard is dat onafgebroke aansprake, dag en nag, op hom gemaak word, en omdat hy tog desnieteenstaande dit alles gedurig in staat moet wees om uit homself te gee.

Die voortstuwende tempo van die moderne lewe tref die dokter op alle vlakke. Hy moet elke dag van die môre tot die aand, en dikwels ook nog van die aand tot die môre, van die een pasiënt na die ander en van die een hospitaal na 'n ander jaag, sodat hy selde meer tyd het om stil te staan en te dink of te lees. Menslike omgang, anders as sy omgang met sy pasiënte, word vir hom dus dikwels noodgedwonge gereduseer tot die wissel van 'n paar „korrekte” woorde en tot die dikwels teensinnige bywoon van sosiale funksies van ander gashere wat, net soos hy, vasgevang is in die vinnige tempo van die lewe en wat, omdat hulle eenvoudig nie die tyd het om hul vriende in klein groepies te ontvang nie, groot, onpersoonlike verpligtingsontvangste reël wat vir niemand eintlik regtig van veel waarde is nie.

As gevolg van die baie spanninge wat daar vandag is, het meer mense behoefte aan tyd vir beraad—om net met 'n vertroueling te kan praat. En die persoon wat die beste gekwalifiseer is om dit te kan doen, is die gesinsgeneesheer. Maar dit is juis hy wat dikwels nie tyd het nie. 'n Mens wonder of dit nie miskien een van die redes is waarom kwaksalwers en ander onopgeleide persone van-

dag so 'n bedreiging word vir die praktyk van nugtere, wetenskaplike, maar ook „menslike” medisyne.

Vir die geneesheer skep hierdie probleem van die maak van voorsiening vir vrye tyd 'n heel lastige vraagstuk aangesien dit vir hom onderhewig is aan die moontlikheid van die verkryging van 'n bevredigende locum terwyl hy weg is, of die maak van 'n bevredigende reëling met 'n kollega. Altwee hierdie moontlikhede is dikwels buite die bereik van die geneesheer, sodat dit daarop neerkom dat hy eintlik onbetaalde verlof moet neem as hy weggaan. Ook trek by hom dan die lot van sy pasiënte aan, sodat hy tog nie heeltemal kan ontspan nie. Hoe dit ook al in die individuele geval bereik word—een feit staan vas, en dit is dat die geneesheer, soos elke ander beskaafde mens, gedurig daarop bedag moet wees dat sy lewe die gevaar loop om in 'n jaagbestaan te vervloei, en dat hy alles wat in sy vermoë is, moet doen om dit te voorkom.

As hy nie vrye tyd het nie—en die meeste dokters het dit nie—*dan moet hy dit skep*. Dit is 'n verpligting wat hy aan homself en aan sy naasbestaandes en pasiënte verskuldig is. Hoe hy dit gaan doen en regkry, is 'n probleem wat elke dokter vir homself moet oplos. Maar dat hy dit moet doen is gewis en seker. As hy dit doen sal hy 'n geleentheid kry om iets van sy innerlike rykdom te bewaar en te verwerk ten behoeve van homself en van die mensdom. As hy dit nie doen nie sal hy al meer sy houvas as persoon op homself en op sy ewenaaste verloor en sal hy die risiko loop om homself al meer bloot te stel aan die vernietigende uitwerking van die tallose spanning- en gedrukte siektes wat 'n bedreiging vir die lewe en gesondheid van soveel dokters is.

Baie dokters besef hierdie probleme en hulle rig hul lewens dienooreenkomstig in. Hulle besef die waarde en die implikasies van 'n stokperdjie of van 'n „tweede taak”. Hulle besef ook dat 'n mens nie noodwendig na 'n spesiale vakansieoord hoef te gaan om te rus nie—alhoewel dit by geleentheid goed en selfs noodsaaklik is, maar dat die regte gebruik van vrye tyd 'n deel van jou daaglikse roetine moet vorm en dat die wese van rus eintlik 'n gemoedstoestand is.

Só beskou en só toegepas kan die gebruik van vrye tyd, wat elke mens vir homself moet skep, 'n vrugbare en behoudende belegging word. In die geval van die dokter sal dit hom help om die nodige perspektief op sy baie en belangrike menslike verhoudings te bly behou. Dit sal hom help om uitvoering te kan gee aan die verwagting dat die dokter hom, veral in hierdie opsig, self moet kan genees, en dit sal hom help om weer opnuut die wesenlike waarheid van dié vermaning in te sien dat dit 'n mens niks help as hy die hele wêreld wen maar skade ly aan sy siel nie.