

aplastic anaemia, hypersplenism, or paroxysmal nocturnal haemoglobinuria. However, care has to be taken in the use of the term preleukaemia as a diagnostic label implying inevitable progression to acute leukaemia since it can be substantiated only when the definite changes of acute leukaemia have developed. Though non-specific, the use of the term "refractory anaemia" may be preferable because it does not necessarily imply that the prognosis is like that of established acute leukaemia. Certainly a diagnosis of leukaemia should not be made if there is any doubt. Can a preleukaemic disorder be halted or reversed? Perhaps a more thorough study of the preleukaemic state may help to provide an answer.

¹ Block, M., Jacobson, L. O., and Bethard, W. F., *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1953, 152, 1018.

² Paraf, A., *Revue d'Hématologie*, 1949, 4, 655.

³ Hamilton-Patterson, J. L., *Acta Haematologica*, 1949, 2, 309.

⁴ Rundles, R. W., in *Hematology*, ed. W. J. Williams, E. Beutler, A. J. Ersley, and R. W. Rundles, p. 725. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972.

⁵ Saarni, M. I., and Linman, J. W., *American Journal of Medicine*, 1973, 55, 38.

⁶ Nowell, P. C., *Cancer*, 1971, 28, 513.

⁷ Senn, J. S., and Pinkerton, P. H., *British Journal of Haematology*, 1972, 23, 277.

The Christmas Pudding

The time may not be far off when only scholars and their like, who retain childhood's power of confusing the symbol with reality and bringing it to life, will understand what was meant by a "groaning board." Libraries will be combed for dusty cookery books; an egg-stained page will evoke the same thrill as do De Quincey's manuscripts stained here and there with circles of laudanum where he put down his tumbler. A particularly fine recipe will be hailed as evidence of an art now lost, like that of colouring mediaeval cathedral glass. The following recipe indicates how rewarding such a pursuit might be:

Constituent	Quantity	Approximate Calorie Equivalent
Suet	6 lb (2.8 kg)	20,000
Flour	4 lb (1.8 kg)	6,648
Demerara sugar ..	2 lb (0.9 kg)	3,646
Raisins	6 lb (2.8 kg)	7,314
Currants	6 lb (2.8 kg)	7,236
Sultanas	2 lb (0.9 kg)	2,470
Candied peel	1½ lb (0.7 kg)	1,878
Chopped almonds ..	¼ lb (0.1 kg)	680
Eggs	48	3,984
Grated peel of 3 lemons		
Brandy	1 bottle	3,500
Port	1 bottle	1,400
	Total	58,756

To compound fifty-five thousand calories (allowing for wastage in cooking) in a single pudding seems almost inconceivable in an age when we more readily concentrate them in a bomb. The present daily calorie intake per head is, on the average, about 2,750, or one-twentieth of the pudding—a portion that might well be eaten in a single large helping. But who cares about the calorie-content of such a creation? Its sustenance is of the spirit, not of the body. The mind is enriched and tranquil after such a meal, free to dream peacefully of those sunlit lands far over the blue, untaxable sea where grapes turn to wizened raisins in a day and the orange ripens. And what more appropriate to the season's international concord than the pudding's constituents?—brandy from France, the West Indies' sugar, almonds from Italy, lemons from the Levant, and Portugal's wine. From hurrying to gain "the poor benefit of a bewildering minute" life slows after such a dinner to a human pace. For just as our hearts quicken at the expense of diastole, our hastened lives have lost much relaxation and leisure. It is the function of Christmas puddings to restore this indispensable refreshment.

If we stress the cultural qualities of the Christmas pudding rather than the nutritional it is because they are more likely to be overlooked. The metabolic implications of such a mountain of food are too obvious and those of the palate too tantalizing to dwell, to dilate, upon further. We turn, rather, to the question of whether scarcity of food will cause us to revert to a more primitive state. Preoccupation with food, the mark of primitive societies, is certainly characteristic of our own today. It was once a common practice all over the world for the tribe to kill its king if the food supply failed; we threaten Governments nowadays. In time of dearth the Mexican Indians propitiated the gods with human sacrifices; we dispatch Ministers. The ritualistic dances and prayers of former times have given way to queuing and form-filling, petitions through trade union channels, and certificates from doctors; and the passion that introduces the topic of food into every conversation once filled the caves of Southern France with paintings of bison and deer. The old charms and formulae have come back to us in a new guise.

Dr. Johnson would today find ample evidence for his declaration that "human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed." Our reduced Christmas pudding is as much a sign of the times as is our swollen Civil Service. Circumstance forces restrictions upon us; perhaps we shall in time become conditioned, like the rats, to finding our way quickly through the maze. More fearful, however, than the shrivelling of our pudding is the speculation whether it may at some time be forbidden altogether—a calamity that did occur once. In 1644 a Puritan Government prohibited the observance of Christmas by Act of Parliament. This must be a tempting precedent to our modern Puritans, and we shall watch developments closely. Meanwhile the season is here; the shops have been emptied and the stockings filled; and doctors will soon be dealing with the wish-bones, beads, sixpences, and tin soldiers that children cram down their throats whether there is a pudding to follow or not. A merry Christmas!