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Editorial

Food and National traits: We publish elsewhere in this issue some observations on human behaviour under experimental semi-starvation and subsequent rehabilitation. Nervous tension, emotional instability and irritability were very marked features observed in all the subjects under study. Humour dried up and the tone of the group became very sober and serious. Apathy was very marked, except in relation to food and curious forms of acquisitive behaviour were developed, perhaps as a compensation for food deprivation. During rehabilitation, recovery from apathy was very rapid and gradually social and cultural interests too, reappeared.

This experiment opens up an interesting line of thought, as to how far our chronic food shortage affects our national traits and characteristics. We must admit that as a nation we are rather deficient in the saving grace of humour, and rather too prone to carry ideals to extremes and not sufficiently realistic to tackle our everyday problems in the most effective manner. There is also an irritability, which finds expression in a narrow, legalistic approach to all questions of social and cultural advancement. The underlying factor of all these features would seem to be our chronic under-nourishment. The well-known Chinese writer Lin Yutang has suggested in one of his essays, formulae for depicting the national traits of different countries. Thus the Englishman is made up of 3 grains of realism, 2 grains of dreams or idealism, 2 grains of humour and 1 grain of sensitivity, giving a "national formula" of $R_3 D_2 H_2 S_1$. Corresponding formulae for other nations are $R_3 D_4 H_1 S_2$ for the Germans, $R_2 D_4 H_1 S_1$ for Russians and $R_2 D_3 H_1 S_1$ for the Japanese, all these three being deficient in a sense of humour and abnormally high in idealism, which makes them susceptible for dictatorships. The Americans have a formula of $R_3 D_3 H_3 S_2$, more or less similar to the English, but with a higher degree of idealism and sensitivity. As

Lin Yutang points out, the Americans are tremendously enthusiastic nearly all the time about something or other. On the whole, the English would seem to have the soundest national make up, their R_3 making for emotional stability and a realistic approach to all problems and their keen sense of humour enabling them to pull through with a smile, out of all sorts of difficult situations. We Indians have not been a free nation long enough to develop national traits as yet, but if one might be attempted on Lin Yutang's model, it would be $R_2 D_4 H_1 S_3$. This formula draws attention to our excessive idealism, and sensitivity (what other people would term "touchiness") a deficiency of humour and sense of realism. We have of course a biological explanation for this, in our chronic under-nourishment, but it cannot serve as a justification. The remedy too, is obvious, being nothing less than a concerted drive to improve food production in the country and raise our national dietary from semi-starvation, to an adequate level.

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