

## NOURISHING TRADITIONS

I've dared to review Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions: the Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (676pp, New Trends Publishing, 2001) probably because my hero Michael Pollan gave her hero, Weston Price, a thumb's up. Pollan notes that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Weston A. Price, along with Albert Schweitzer and others, documented links between the "Western diet" – white flour, refined sugar, processed foods – and Western diseases – tooth decay, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, strokes, etc. And the almost total absence of these diseases among isolated populations living on a wide variety of other diets.

Price published his findings in *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration* (1939). In the early 1930's this Cleveland dentist studied populations largely untouched by civilization – Swiss, Gaels, Polynesians and many more. Some lived mainly on meat and dairy, others on seafood, still others mainly on vegetables. What they had in common was excellent health – until they encountered the Western diet.

As Pollan says, "Cancer and heart disease and so many of the other Western diseases are by now such an accepted part of modern life that it's hard for us to believe this wasn't always or even necessarily the case."

Price, studying peoples worldwide soon to be absorbed into modern life but as yet free of it, tried to show that this indeed was not always the case. Again and again he found "primitives," as he called them, without tooth decay, tuberculosis, etc. – until they began to eat store food.

Sally Fallon extracts from Price's book the principles of healthy eating among traditional peoples, and, adding an abundance of more recent research, builds a modern cookbook around them.

In so doing she overturns much current nutritional wisdom, including our insistence on lowering cholesterol through low fat foods, our love affair with soy and vegetable oils, with pasteurized, homogenized milk, and grains that haven't been soaked or sprouted.

Here's a selection of her dietary emphases.

She rejects low fat diets in favor of saturated animal fats, lard and tallow. The real culprits, she says, are processed vegetable oils.

Among carbohydrates she chooses what's least processed. Eat sugar as fruit, honey or maple syrup or as Rapadura, the least refined cane sugar. Eat whole grains and fresh vegetables and fruit, not canned or processed.

Fallon damns vegetarianism with faint praise: it's fine for the most evolved among us, the "rare St. Theresa," but not for growing children or expecting mothers, who need the full range of nutrients, including fat and proteins from animals.

She notes that many people worldwide cannot tolerate fresh milk. Traditional peoples, having no way to preserve it, transformed it through fermentation into such foods as cheese, that they could digest and store. Fallon recommends raw milk, unpasteurized, its nutrients still intact, as well as buttermilk, whole milk yogurt, butter and raw cheese.

She would have us process food by freezing, drying, pickling, fermenting and culturing – the only methods that don't destroy nutrients.

She gives lists of “Nourishing traditional foods,” to be sought after, “Compromise foods,” to be indulged only occasionally, and “Newfangled foods,” to be avoided at all costs – including, alas, chocolate.

I myself have begun soaking grains overnight with vinegar or yogurt, to help break down their resistance to digestion. I'm shifting from vegetable to olive oil, and have reduced microwave use – a giant experiment, Fallon says, with ourselves as guinea pigs.

This is above all a teaching cookbook. Besides the introductions, sidebars with each of the recipes give the history and nutritional value of key ingredients. Fallon wants you to know that what you eat matters profoundly. Think, she says, before you cook.

I'm a neophyte, but intrigued, and when the local Weston Price group next meets, I will certainly be there