

Book Review

THE CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF FOODS. By DAVID PEARSON. Pp. 604 + vii. London: J. and A. Churchill. 6th Edition 1970. Price £6.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new . . .": thus, according to Tennyson, spake King Arthur from the barge, and, could he return today (possibly by hovercraft), he would doubtless be astonished not only by the extent but also by the rate of change. Nowhere is the process more noticeable than in the field of science, and food analysis is no exception; the c.c. has given way to the ml, nanometers have replaced millimicrons, GLC no longer necessarily means Greater London Council and that which was "Cox" has become "Pearson". It says something for the skill and enthusiasm which Mr. Pearson has brought to his task that many of us who were reared on "Cox" have learned to assimilate "Pearson" without so much as a hiccup: and yet, in an unobtrusive way, he has managed to permeate the book with his own personality.

The Chemical Analysis of Foods first appeared in 1926 and ran to four editions before the untimely death of Dr. H. E. Cox in 1951. The fourth edition comprised some 340 pages, the fifth, in 1962, 464, and this, the second under the aegis of the present author, outstrips its predecessor by no fewer than 140 pages! At this rate of growth, the end of the century should see a two volume edition—or will everything be on microfilm by then?

The general layout of the book has been preserved and, apart from the insertion of a two-page introduction, the sixteen chapter headings are virtually identical with those of the previous edition, while the number of appendices has been increased from six to ten. Rather surprisingly, the greatest proportional increase in subject matter occurs in chapter 7, where the number of pages devoted to "Fruit and Vegetable Products" has more than doubled; chapter 3, "Additives and Contaminants", shows a modest fifty per cent. increase and includes useful sections on emulsifiers, stabilisers and pesticide residues. There are some welcome additions to the microscopical drawings in chapter 9, although sage is the only culinary herb which is afforded this distinction. A number of useful tables have also been added.

No reviewer worth his salt would pass up the opportunity of airing his own particular prejudices, so due allowance must be made for what follows. One notes in passing, despite the example of the B.P. and "The Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Regulations", that the author has not allowed mercury to displace the time-honoured copper sulphate/selenium catalyst in the working method for the Kjeldahl nitrogen determination. It would be helpful to have more structural formulae or, at least, systematic names of those materials whose common names give little guide to their chemical structure; saccharin and cyclamic acid are well provided in this respect, but not so such substances as sorbic and dehydroacetic acids and ethoxyquin.

There are occasional lapses into infelicitous English, and the reviewer is roused to protest at the frequent use of "due to" as a compound preposition where grammatical idiom requires "owing to". Among the more illustrious voices that have been raised against this practice are those of Fowler and Sir Ernest Gowers, both of whom are explicit on the correct usage; but the battle seems to be all but lost (owing to indifference, or just an oversight due to the pace of modern life?). On page 92, and again on page 332, the verb "infer" is used when the sense demands "imply".

One misprint only caught the reviewing eye—"pyrodoxin" for "pyridoxine" on page 370. It appeared at first that "adjectively", on page 339, was another, but both Fowler and Chambers allow this form, although the former comments that "adjectivally" is preferable; it is certainly more usual.

The cover, like W. S. Gilbert's babes, is "strong and stout and, considering all things clever"; certainly, it has a modern, functional look. The binding, one hopes, is adequate but one waits in trepidation to see what time and the laboratory staff will do to it.

This is a workmanlike book, a useful and practical book, which every food analyst will want to have to hand, and no one should underestimate the amount of solid effort that has gone into its preparation. It is well provided with references and Mr. Pearson is to be congratulated on maintaining the consistently high standard of this well-known work, which he has brought up to date without altering its essential character.

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