

BOOK REVIEW . . .

Roger J. Williams, *THE PREVENTION OF ALCOHOLISM THROUGH NUTRITION* (New York: Bantam, 1981), 160 pages, US\$2.50, A\$3.50.

THIS book caught my attention not due to any personal worries about alcohol – I seldom have more than a couple of glasses of wine in a fortnight – but because of my previous familiarity with Dr Williams' writings. There are few who write on the nutritional approach to health that are able to satisfy both specialists and the general public. Adelle Davis' 'Let's Get Well' is widely used by members of the public but is often attacked by doctors, both because of Davis' occasional idiosyncracies and use of anecdotal evidence, and also because of her position outside the medical profession and her criticisms of the food industry.

Dr Williams is a research biochemist of long standing and the discoverer of pantothenic acid. His book 'Nutrition Against Disease' is both accessible and authoritative.

Dr Williams has studied alcoholism since the 1940s, and written several books and numerous technical papers on the subject. In this short book he presents for the nonspecialist reader seven steps to prevent alcoholism most effectively: treat yourself as a biochemically unique individual; eat high quality foods; avoid low quality foods; exercise; cultivate moderation; use nutritional supplements; and take supplementary glutamine. These steps are justified by reference to the biochemistry of alcoholism. Dr Williams comments that "In my extensive experience in the field of nutrition and in attempting to combat alcoholism, I have never known anyone to become an alcoholic who has followed our recommendations even approximately."

The larger portion of the book is not about the prevention of alcoholism *per se*, but rather about why the medical profession has, by and large, treated alcoholism as an 'alien disease' and failed to come to grips with it, particularly

with preventive measures. Some of the reasons cited by Dr Williams are the unusual nature of alcoholism, medical research specialisation, emphasis on cure and treatment, failure to recognise inborn individuality (a subject on which Dr Williams has written pioneering works), and the "exclusion from medical thinking of the concept of quality control of nutritional cellular environments". This section of the book should be of special interest to professionals working to overcome the shortcomings of professional medicine.

As Dr Williams notes, the human and social cost of alcoholism is enormous. The path of prevention as presented in his book and backed up by many technical studies seems at the very least worthy of extensive trials. One suspects, though, that even should the medical profession strongly back measures for prevention of alcoholism, there would be, as in the case of cigarette smoking, strong economic and political pressures opposing any reduction in the scale of present alcohol consumption.

– BRIAN MARTIN