

BEACHCOMBER



90 YEARS OLD AND STILL ENJOYING HIS FOOD...

I COULD not help noticing, as I watched the Queen making her speech at the State Opening of Parliament the other day, that she was not dipping into a bag of chocolate buttons as she spoke. Personally, I have always found that nibbling chocolate is one of the best ways to overcome the natural dullness of such an event and I am sure Her Majesty feels the same way, so her abstinence from chocolate on this occasion merits some explanation.

The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that the world of foodstuffs has taken leave of its senses and this lunacy has even spread to the royal chocolatiers. Prestat, you see, whose products proudly bear the royal warrant, have launched a new chocolate bar called Choxi+ of which they say the following: "Choxi+ naturally contains more flavanol antioxidants than any other food. Just two squares of either milk or dark Choxi+ will provide all the antioxidants your body needs for a whole day."

What on earth are these people thinking of? I do not eat chocolate in order to feel healthy, I eat it in order to feel good, in a slightly evil way. "Never feel guilty about eating chocolate again", say the chaps from Prestat. But I want to feel guilty, or at least a little mischievous when I eat chocolate, and I am sure Her Majesty feels the same way. I am not going to eat chocolate for the antioxidant flavonols. I eat it for its antidepressant flavour and its theobromine and phenylethylamine - which are both mood-enhancing, serotonin-boosting psychotropic chemicals. This effect could be cancelled out if I thought the chocolate was a health food that might be good for me. (Have you not noticed how miserable people look in health food shops?)

And what's all this nonsense about "just two squares a day"? How are the Queen and I expected to survive on just two squares of chocolate a day? It's a most depressing thought totally counter to the spirit of chocolate.

The good news, however, is that having closed my mind to all things healthy, I wolfed down a whole bar of the stuff and found, once I had excluded all thoughts of antioxidant goodness, that it tasted not bad at all. Not unlike a good bar of chocolate, in fact. I wiped away any remaining vestiges of healthy thoughts by washing it down with a handful or two of Prestat's single origin Sao Tome dark chocolate buttons, which I can assure Her Majesty could easily be eaten surreptitiously while intoning a speech at the opening of Parliament.

It is all, I fear, part of a terribly unhealthy trend towards healthy eating. Only the other day, I received a sample of a new breakfast cereal called LoveDean. With plenty of oats and nuts and suchlike, I am sure it is very healthy, but the wealth of propaganda that came with it extolling its benefits depressed me so much that by the time I came to eat it, my chocolate-craving senses refused to register anything other than the usual health-food blandness.

Rather than waste the tub of cereal, however, I decided to do what I always do with healthy food to make it more palatable, which is to keep adding unhealthy ingredients until it tastes wonderful. And I must say, if you add plenty of butter, sugar and syrup to LoveDean No.2 granola, then roll it out thinly, cut into biscuit shapes and bake in a moderate oven for 13 minutes, you end up with biscuits that go deliciously well when spread with Stilton cheese. I shall coat the next match in Choxi+ and send them to the Queen.

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