

**Vitamin C and the Common Cold.** By Linus Pauling; 1970. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company. 8"x5¼", pp. 128. Price: \$US3.95 (cloth) or \$US1.95 (paperback).

PROFESSOR LINUS PAULING has written this short book in support of the popularly held belief that vitamin C can either prevent the common cold or shorten its course. A series of investigators, including those, at the Common Cold Research Unit in Salisbury in 1967, have failed to find scientific evidence that this is so; but when the holder of two Nobel prizes (Chemistry and Peace) takes up the case for ascorbic acid, it becomes worth while to take another look at the evidence and the arguments.

Pauling brings no new experimental evidence. He takes the old studies, and either reinterprets negative results from his own viewpoint or explains them away by criticizing aspects of the experimental design. A frequent criticism is that the test dose of vitamin C was too small. In the Salisbury experiments, he states that the number of subjects was too small for statistical analysis.

FAO recommends for adults a daily intake, of ascorbic acid of 30 mg. This is also the amount set by the National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia. These standards provide a safety margin over the 10 mg found to prevent scurvy. Vitamin C must do more than prevent scurvy; but while its functions in the body are not completely understood, there must, be some doubt about the optimum intake. Pauling contends that the optimum intake is at least 100 times these accepted dietary standards. To support this claim, he quotes studies of the vitamin C intake of the gorilla (like man, dependent on a dietary source), the rate of vitamin C synthesis of the rat, and personal experiences in aborting a cold. His explanation for these massive requirements, based on man's evolutionary development from a

largely vegetarian diet, is presented with his well-known flair and enthusiasm. For a nutritionist, the chapter "Vitamin C and Evolution" contains some pieces of fascinating speculation.

There is a standard account of the discovery of the vitamins and another chapter gives more detailed attention to ascorbic acid, its properties and food sources. These and the chapter on the common cold could be of interest to serious-minded members of the public. He takes a chapter to discuss "orthomolecular medicine". The megavitamin therapy he proposes is one example of this type of therapy.

The reader is likely to be intrigued by the author's conviction and attractive exposition, and yet conclude that the value of vitamin C in the prevention of the cold remains "not proven". In these days of neglect of nutrition, it makes a change that one of the nutrients has found such an enthusiastic and distinguished champion.