

VEGETARIANISM.

BY THE EDITOR.

A FAMOUS German materialist who denied absolutely the existence of the soul used to say "Man is what he eats—*Der Mensch ist was er isst.*" Hence questions of religion gained a culinary foundation and morality was identified with the dietetics of the stomach. This is consistent with the principles of materialism, for if man were the matter of which his body is made, his diet would be the alpha and omega of his life. But this is not the case. As a table is a table on account of its shape and purpose, not on account of its being made of wood; as the Sistine Madonna is a beautiful picture on account of the forms of its figures and the delicacy of its tints, not on account of being a large piece of canvas covered with paint representing a thought of deep significance, so man is man on account of the ideas that prompt him to action, not on account of being made up of carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen, a few other elements, and some salts. Man is not what he eats but what he thinks and does, his character is not in the way he chews but in the way he acts; he is judged not by digestion but by words and behavior. This truth has been tersely expressed by the great Nazarene prophet, who said :

"Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (Matt. xv. 11.)

The question of food has no direct but only an indirect bearing upon morality. It is more important how we eat than what we eat. We eat for a certain purpose. We eat in order to live, and our food must be adapted to the purpose. It must keep us in good health and must enable us to be efficient in our work. The question of food, therefore, must ultimately be decided before the tribunal of hygiene. The gourmand is not the connoisseur whose advice should be most highly valued in eating and drinking, but

the physician, the man who knows the physiology of the human body and its needs.

The regulation of our diet, although it has only an indirect bearing upon morality, is nevertheless of great importance and its neglect is accompanied with severe punishments. Physicians alone know how many diseases are due to a neglect of the simplest rules of dietetic, and many valuable lives, cut short before their time, could have been longer preserved for the good of their families as well as for the welfare of society at large.

A mixed diet is apparently the best food for man. It is possible for man to subsist on vegetables alone, but he will have to take larger quantities of food and eat more frequently during the day; otherwise his energy would scarcely be sufficient to meet all the requirements of an active life. Yet on the other hand, man cannot live on a meat diet alone, for experience has proved that indulgence in meat is directly injurious to health.

During the Franco-Prussian war the army before Metz had not a sufficient vegetable supply, and was for some time confined to a pure meat diet, while the army before Paris in a similar way suffered from a want of meat, but enjoyed a superabundance of vegetables. The consequences were injurious only to the army before Metz, where diseases increased, while the health of the army before Paris remained satisfactory.¹ Pure meat diet apparently reduces in the system the power of resistance to infectious diseases, while the drawbacks of a pure vegetable diet are rather negative than positive, and some of them are avoided if food is taken in sufficient quantities.

The question of food becomes more complicated by the plea of those who deem it wrong for man to live on the flesh of animals. And no doubt the mere idea of feeding on our dumb fellow creatures is disagreeable. Nevertheless, we cannot help utilising lower life for the enhancement of the higher life, for otherwise we must either starve or at least be satisfied with a great reduction of human life and a restriction in the enfoldment of its capacities. Consider that if the principle of regarding animal life as on an equal level with human life be just, we must not only abstain from meat, but from everything that directly serves to sustain animals. Eggs are potential chickens, and the cow's milk is the righteous property of the calf. Butter and cheese would have to be forbidden together with milk, and to wear leather shoes or use brushes made of bris-

¹We ought also to consider, however, that the army before Metz was more exposed to the inclemencies of the weather, especially to dampness, than the army before Paris.

tles would be a sin which encourages the slaughter of animals. It goes without saying that we must not make buttons of bone, horn, or mother-of-pearl; we must banish soap (with the exception of soaps made of vegetable oils) and make new inventions to replace glue.

Vegetarians are in the habit of making other people feel grewsome at the thought of flesh food. They call roast turkey carcasses and corpses, and declare that they do not want to make a graveyard of their stomachs.

It is easy enough to spoil the appetite of anybody, even of vegetarians. A friend of mine who is not in good health at present and has watched vegetable gardening in California, writes:

"Really this life is awful, and sometimes I would flee from it. For a long time meat was extremely repulsive to me. I could not bear the sight of it, but my appetite returned and I began to eat it from time to time. Some of my friends say 'You are improving in health,' others say 'The animal spirits demand recognition.' I would be happy if I could live on air. Things that grow wild are perhaps the purest food; but when I see the Chinaman enriching the land for his garden and the ranchman doing the same in the orchard, I long to quit the world that I'll never be compelled to eat vegetables and fruit again. The more delicious the asparagus and the oranges are, the more we ought to loathe them."

Certainly if we trace the material circuit of things, we might be disgusted with our own bodies. Even if we lived on air the situation would in this respect not be changed much. The probability is that the atoms of the blood which courses through our veins have served all kinds of foul purposes. Only think of the oxygen in the air and consider the combinations of the same element in putrefaction and other forms of decadence! But we must never leave out of sight that we are not made of matter: we are the thoughts and sentiments, the ideas and aspirations of our soul. The material particles are needed to give actuality to our soul; but the soul is constituted by the significance of their forms. The materiality of our body does as little defile the soul as an oil painting suffers detracton because the paints which constitute its beauty would be mere grease spots if they could be transferred to another place.

Ethics is of the spirit, not of matter. Thoughts embodied in words are the soul's food as meat and bread are the stomach's food. Important as is eating and drinking for the sustenance of life, important as is continence and the proper choice according to conditions, we repeat that the regulation thereof cannot be determined by psychological principles but only according to hygienic experiences.

Vegetarians love to quote a verse which is found in Deutero-Isaiah, and reads :

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man.” (lxvi. 3.)

The passage is supposed to be written in denunciation of the Samaritan temple practices. Whatever it may mean, it does not support vegetarianism at all, for it is directed against the sacrifice of animals, strictly tabooed by the Mosaic law, which were offered in Samaria, and the context implies that the lawful sacrifices should be offered. Hebrew scholars interpret the original in the sense of: “He who slaughters an ox, but also slays a man,” and the prophet declares that God will bring on them the things they dread.¹

The Hindus are not so strict vegetarians as they are generally supposed to be. Their objection to the English as beef-eaters is not on the ground that they eat flesh, but that they slaughter oxen and cows. Many Hindus would without compunction slaughter a sheep and eat it, but they abstain from beef because the cow is a sacred animal, and with them the slaughter of a cow is actually not less a crime than the slaughter of a man. Could we trace in Isaiah any Indian influence, we might retain the traditional reading of the text and regard that strange verse (lxvi. 3) as a Hindu sentiment wafted upon the soil of Hebrew literature.

The Buddhists of China once prevailed upon a pious emperor to prohibit the manufacture of silk because the worms in the cocoons must be killed before their threads can be utilised. Of course if the silkworm's life is of the same dignity as man's life it would be wrong to destroy a cocoon for the purpose of providing human beings with clothes.

If the life of animals had to be regarded as sacred as human life there can be no doubt about it that whole industries would be destroyed and human civilisation would at once drop down to a very primitive condition.

We need not enter here into a detailed exposition of the suffering to which innumerable human beings would thereby be exposed. Many millions would starve and large cities would disappear from the face of the earth. But the brute creation would suffer too. There might be a temporary increase of brute life, but certainly not of happiness. Cattle would only be raised for draught oxen and milk kine, and they would not die the sudden death at the hands of the butcher but slowly of old age or by disease. Their

¹For further details see the new translation in the “Polychrome Bible,” Isaiah, pp. 114 and 199.

numbers would, after all, have to be considerably reduced, for it is not probable that the farmers would raise cattle as companions or for the mere enjoyment of feeding them.

We must see to it that the suffering of brute creatures be abolished or at least reduced to its minimum, but it would be more than foolish to regard an ox or any other dumb creature as of equal worth with man or to impute to brutes the same thoughts and sentiments as we possess ourselves.

Buddha is frequently supposed to have been a vegetarian and a strong supporter of vegetarianism; but this is an error. We grant that Buddhists all over the world show a strong preference for a vegetarian diet, but Buddha himself ate meat just as Jesus ate and drank with the sinners, laying himself open to the obloquy of being "a man gluttonous and a winebibber." (Matth. xi. 19.)

Moral courage, no doubt, was needed in a country such as is India to declare that meat-eating was no sin, but the Buddhist traditions are unequivocal on this point. Considering the vegetarian tendencies of Buddhists, and especially of the Buddhist priesthood, there is not the slightest reason to suspect these traditions as later inventions. I will not here insist on the report that Buddha's last meal consisted of dried boar's meat, because, according to Herr Zimmerman's ingenious hypothesis, we must interpret the word *Sûkaramaddavam* in the sense of boar's wort, which is supposed to be an edible fungus.¹ But there are other evidences of more importance which leave not the slightest shadow of a doubt as to their meaning. First of all, Buddha pronounced the principle that meat-eating does not defile. We read in the *Chûlavagga*, 2, 5:

"Those persons who in this world are unrestrained in sensual pleasures, greedy of sweet things, associated with what is impure, sceptics, unjust, difficult to follow—all this is what defiles, but not the eating of flesh."

This Sutta on things that defile (called *Âmagandha-Sutta*) is written in the form of a discussion between *Âmagandha-Brâhmana* and *Kassapa-Buddha*. The Brahman abstains from meat-eating because he claims that it defiles, but *Kassapa-Buddha*, representing the orthodox Buddhist standpoint, points out that no rituals, no fasting, no tonsure, nor wearing of matted hair, nor worshipping the fire, nor doing penances, nor oblations and sacrifices can purify a man; nor can abstinence from the eating of flesh. The refrain "but not the eating of flesh" is repeated seven times. The sutta ends with the conversion of the vegetarian to Buddha's more spiritual conception of defilement. (See *S. B. E.*, X, part I., pp. 40-42.)

¹ See Naumann, *Reden Gautamo Buddho's*, Leipsic, 1896, p. xix.

But the evidence that Buddha did not condemn meat-eating is more direct still. We read in Jataka, 246, that a layman, Sihasenāpati by name, when entertaining the Master, offered him food with meat in it. This gave offence to the naked ascetics, and the Jataka continues :

"The brethren discussed this matter in their Hall of Truth : ' Friend, Nāthaputta the Ascetic goes about sneering, because, he says, " Priest Gotama eats meat prepared on purpose for him, with his eyes open".' Hearing this, the Master rejoined : ' This is not the first time, brethren, that Nāthaputta has been *sneering at me for eating meat which was got ready for me on purpose*; he did just so in former times.' "

Buddhists consider it wrong to kill animals, and therefore they dislike the butcher. Priests are generally supposed to abstain from meat-eating, but they are not forbidden meat if it is offered. According to Hardy's *Manual* Buddha is reported to have said :

" My priests have permission to eat whatever food it is customary to eat in any place or country, so that it be done without the indulgence of the appetite, or evil desire. "

If any one took compassion on suffering creatures of any kind certainly Buddha did, and yet he was not a vegetarian. If vegetarianism could be upheld on any religious or humanitarian grounds he certainly would have preached it.

" Si Pergumum dextra defendi potuit certe hac defensa fuisset ! "

We are sorry to see the vegetarian movement carried on with a vigor which deserves a better cause, and wish heartily that the same efforts would be devoted to the broader aim of humanising man's conduct toward animals. Here the friends of the dumb creation would find the unreserved sympathy of everybody. The great mass of vegetarian literature, however, is simply ridiculous, and can, whenever taken seriously, only serve to spoil a man's appetite for everything and render him disgusted with the materiality of existence in general.

After these expositions we must make a confession which seems to surrender the whole case. While we grant that under present circumstances the slaughter of animals on the altar of civilisation could not be discontinued without demolishing an enormous part of the means by which mankind is sustained, we cannot help seeing in vegetarianism an ideal that might, to some extent, be realised on a higher level of existence when the sciences have been sufficiently advanced so as to produce the complex products of organic chemistry directly from the inorganic elements in the retorts of the laboratory. The idea is very pleasant, but to-day it is a mere dream.