

THE USE OF MEAT

I am asked many questions as to my attitude toward the question of meat-eating. I was brought up on a diet of meat, bread and butter, potatoes, and sweet things. Four years ago when I found myself desperately run down, suffering from nervousness, insomnia, and almost incessant headaches, I came upon various articles written by vegetarians, and I began to suspect that my trouble might be due to meat. I went away on a camping-trip for several weeks, taking no meat with me, and because I found that I was a great deal better, I believed that the meat had been responsible for my trouble. I then visited the Battle Creek Sanitarium, and became familiar with all their arguments against meat, and thereafter I did not use it for three years. I called myself a vegetarian; but at the same time I realized that I differed from most vegetarians in some important particulars.

For instance, I had never taken any stock in the arguments for vegetarianism upon the moral side. It has always seemed to me that human[[Pg 87](#)] beings have a right to eat meat, if meat is necessary for their best development, either physical or mental. I have never had any sympathy with that "humanitarianism" which tells us that it is our duty to regard pigs and chickens as our brothers. I was listening the other day to one of these enthusiasts, who had been reading aloud one of the "Uncle Remus" stories, and who went on in touching language to set forth the fact that his vegetable garden constituted one place where "Bre'r Rabbit" was free to wander at will and to help himself; and he described how happy it made him to see these gentle animals hopping about among his cabbages, having lost all their fear of him. That sort of thing will work very well so long as it is confined to one farm, and so long as there is a hunting season upon all the other farms in the locality; but let the humanitarians proceed to apply their regimen in a whole state, and they will soon have so many billions of rabbits hopping about among their cabbages that they will have to choose between shooting rabbits or having no cabbages.

The reader, I presume, is familiar with calculations which show the rate at which rabbits multiply, how many tens and hundreds of millions would be produced by a single pair of rabbits in ten years. It should be quite obvious that the[[Pg 88](#)] time would come when all human beings would be spending their energies in planting gardens to support rabbits; and that if ever they stopped planting gardens, there would be a famine for the rabbits, with infinitely more suffering than is involved in the present method of keeping them down. Also, even though the humanitarians might have their way with men, the hawks and the owls and the foxes would probably remain unregenerate. I remember, when I was a small boy, being sternly rebuked by an agitated maiden lady who discovered me throwing stones at a squirrel. Not so many days afterwards, however, the lady discovered the squirrel engaged in carrying off young birds from a nest outside her window, and she found her theories about "kindness to dumb animals" rudely disturbed.

The same thing, it seems to me, is still more true of domestic animals. Domestic animals survive on earth solely because of the protection of man, and for the sake of the benefits they bring to him. If it is necessary to human health and well-being to slaughter a cow rather than to wait and let her die of old age and lingering disease, it seems to me that nothing but mawkish sentimentality would protest.

It is pointed out to us what places of cruelty and filth our slaughter-houses are; the reader may[Pg 89] believe that I learned something about this in my preparations for the writing of "The Jungle." But then this is not necessarily true about slaughter-houses—any more than it is necessarily true that railroads must kill and maim a couple of hundred thousand people in this country every year. In Europe they have municipal slaughter-houses which are constructed upon scientific lines, and in which no filth is permitted to accumulate; also they have devised means for the killing of animals which are painless. In the stockyards I have seen a man standing upon a gallery, leaning over and pounding at the head of a steer with a hammer, and making half a dozen blows before he succeeded in knocking down the terrified animal. In Europe, on the other hand, they fit over the head of the animal a leathern cap, which has in it a steel spike; a single tap upon the head of this spike is sufficient to drive it into the animal's brain, causing instant insensibility.

And it must be borne in mind also that the sufferings of dumb animals are entirely different from our own. They do not suffer the pains of anticipation. A cow walks into a slaughter-house without fear, and stands still and permits a leathern cap to be fitted over its head without suspicion; and while it is placidly grazing in the field, it is untroubled by any consciousness of the fact that[Pg 90] next week it will be hanging in a butcher's shop as beef. I recall in this connection an observation of that wise philosopher, Mr. Dooley, concerning the inhumanities of vegetarianism. He said that it had always seemed to him a very cruel thing "to cut off a young tomato in its prime, or to murder a whole cradle full of baby peas in the pod."

These things will convince the devotee of the religion of vegetarianism that I am a lost soul, and always have been. Perhaps so. I try to guide my conduct by scientific knowledge; what I ask to know about the question of meat-eating is the actual facts of its effect upon the human organism—the amount of energy which it develops, the diseases which it causes, or, on the contrary, the immunity to disease which it claims to confer; also, of course, its cheapness and convenience as an article of diet. Some evidence of this sort we possess; but very little, it seems to me, in proportion to the importance of the subject. Professor Fisher has conducted some thorough experiments as to the influence of meat-eating upon endurance, which seem to develop the fact that vegetarians possess a far greater amount of endurance than meat-eaters. These experiments are what we want, but they seemed to me, when I read them, to be weak in one or two [Pg 91] important particulars. They did not tell us what the vegetarians ate, nor what the meat-eaters ate. Those who are vegetarians at the present day are very apt to be people who have given some thought to the question of diet, and have attempted to adopt sounder ways of life; while, on the other hand, meat-eaters are generally people who have given no thought to the question of health at all—they are very apt to be smokers and drinkers as well as meat-eaters. Also it is to be pointed out that endurance is not the only factor of importance to our physical well-being.

There have been numerous expositions of the greater liability of meat to contamination. Dr. Kellogg, for instance, has purchased specimens of meat in the butcher-shops, and has had them examined under the microscope, and has told us how many hundreds of millions of bacteria to the gram have been discovered. This argument has a tendency to appal one; I know it had great effect upon me for a long time, and I took elaborate pains to take into my system only those kinds of food which were sterilized, or practically so. This is the health regimen which is advocated by Professor Metchnikoff; one should eat only foods which have been thoroughly boiled and sterilized. I have come, in the course of time, to the conclusion that this way of living is suicidal, and that[Pg 92] there is no way of destroying one's health more quickly. I think that the important question is, not how many bacteria there are in the food when you swallow it, but how many bacteria there come to be in food after it gets into your alimentary canal. The digestive juices are apparently able to take care of a very great number of germs; it is after the food has passed on down, and is lodged in the large intestine, that the real fermentation and putrefaction begin—and these count for more, in the question of health, than that which goes on in the butcher-shop or the refrigerator or the pantry.

Do not misunderstand what I mean by this. I am not advocating that anyone should swallow the bacteria of deadly diseases, such as typhoid and cholera; I am not advocating that anyone should use food which is in a state of decomposition—on the contrary, I have ruled out of my dietary a number of foods in common use which depend for their production upon bacterial action; for instance, beer and wine, and all alcoholic drinks, all kinds of cheeses, sauerkraut, vinegar, etc. My point is simply that the ordinary healthy person has no reason for terrifying himself about the common aërobic bacteria—which swarm in the atmosphere, and are found by hundreds of millions in all raw food, and in cooked food which[Pg 93] has not been kept with the elaborate precautions that a surgeon uses with his instruments and linen; also that the real problem is to take into the system those foods which can be readily digested and assimilated, and which afford the body all the elements that it needs to keep itself in the best condition for the inevitable, incessant warfare with the hostile organisms which surround it.

So far as meat is concerned, of course no sensible person would use meat which showed the slightest trace of being spoiled, nor any meat which had been canned, or ground up and made into messes, such as sausage. If one uses reasonably fresh meat, the bacteria which may be on the outside of it will be killed by proper cooking. And so the question is, it seems to me, what does meat do after it gets into the stomach? And that is a matter for practical experiment, which very few people have made, so far as I have any information. Innumerable people are eating meat, of course; but they are eating it in combination with all other kinds of destructive foods, and they are eating it prepared in innumerable unwholesome ways. So far as I know, no scientist has ever taken a group of normal men and kept them for a certain period upon a rational vegetarian diet, and then put them for another period upon a diet containing[Pg 94] broiled fresh meat, and made a thoroughly scientific study of their condition, as, for instance, Professor Chittenden did for his "low proteid" experiments.

For about a year previous to reading about Dr. Salisbury's "meat diet," I had been following the raw-food regimen. I had gained wonderful results from this, and I had written a good deal about it; but I had got these results while leading an active life, and not doing hard brain-work. I found

continually that when I settled down to a sedentary life, and to writing which involved a great nervous strain, I began to lose weight on raw food; and if I kept on with this regimen, I would begin to have headaches, and other signs of distress from what I was eating. As an illustration of what I mean, I might say that quite recently I plunged into a novel in which I was very much absorbed, and I lost twelve pounds in sixteen days; and this, it must be understood, without changing my diet in the slightest particular. I went on with the work for about six weeks, and by that time I had lost twenty pounds. In explaining this to myself, I was divided between uncertainty as to whether I was working too hard, or whether I was eating too much. Finally I took the precaution to weigh what I was eating, and to make quite certain that[Pg 95] I was eating no more than I had been accustomed to eat during periods when I had remained at my normal weight. I then cut the quantity of my food in half, and found that I lost much less rapidly. This served to convince me that the trouble lay in the fact that I had not sufficient nervous energy left to assimilate the food that I was taking.

And I have known others to have this same experience. Bernarr Macfadden, in particular, told me that he could not get along upon the nut and fruit diet while closely confined in his office, and that he found the solution of his problem in milk. Inasmuch as there is nothing that poisons me quite so quickly as milk, I had to look farther for my solution. As a matter of fact, I had been looking for this solution for more than ten years, though it is only quite recently that I had come to understand the problem clearly. It is a problem which every brain-worker faces; and I am sure, therefore, that there will be many who will find the report of my experiments and blunders to be of interest to them. I have tried, under these circumstances, all kinds of the more digestible foods—toast, rice, baked potatoes, baked apples, milk, poached eggs, and so on; always I have found that these foods digested perfectly, but they poisoned my system because of their [Pg 96]constipating effect; and this was a dilemma which I was never able to get around.

I now read Dr. Salisbury's book, "The Relation of Alimentation to Disease." Many of his experiments I found extremely interesting. Dr. Salisbury described the consequences of the ordinary starch and sugar diet as making a "yeast-pot" of one's intestinal tract. I found in my own case many of the symptoms which he described, and I determined to see what would be the effect of the meat diet in my case.

I began the experiment with reluctance. I had lost all interest in the taste of meat, and I had a prejudice against it; I hated the smell of it, and I hated the feeling of it, and I was prepared for the direst consequences, according to the prophecies of my vegetarian friends. I should not have been at all surprised if I had been made very ill by my first meal. I was prepared to allow for that, supposing that after three years I had perhaps forgotten how to digest meat. To my surprise, however, I found no difficulty at all. I soon gave up preparing the meat according to the elaborate prescription of Dr. Salisbury, and contented myself simply with eating good lean beef-steak. I continued the experiment for two weeks, living upon meat exclusively. I found that all my symptoms of stomach trouble disappeared, and I had[Pg 97] no headaches whatever. I got quite weak upon the exclusive diet, but this was according to Dr. Salisbury's statement; just as soon as I added a little shredded wheat biscuit and dried fruit to the menu this trouble disappeared, and I gained in weight with great rapidity, and was soon back where I had been before.

I did not continue the diet, owing partly to distaste for it, and partly to the inconvenience of it. I had accustomed myself to the raw food way of living, and any one who knows what this means can understand my distaste for washing plates and scraping frying-pans, and going to the bother of getting fresh meat and keeping it and cooking it. Also, of course, there was the item of expense. Upon the raw-food diet I had been able to live for ten cents a day. I am never accustomed to spending more than thirty or forty cents a day, even when indulging in abundant fresh fruit.

Perhaps I ought also to specify that a good deal of the success of the diet may have been owing to the hot-water regimen which is a part of it. An hour or two before every meal one is supposed to sip at least a pint of very hot water, which has the effect of cleansing out the stomach, and stimulates peristaltic action to a remarkable degree. I had been accustomed to drink hot[Pg 98] water while fasting, but I had never taken it systematically, as I did at this time. It is a trick well worth knowing about.

I ought also to mention the fact that I suggested to several others that they try this meat diet. One of them, a friend who had been eating raw food at my suggestion, with the very best results, began the experiment and continued for three days, and the results were most disappointing. This friend, a woman in middle years, became very ill, with all the symptoms of stomach trouble, diarrhoea, and general poisoning. She wrote me that she gave up the diet at the end of three days, because she saw no use in making herself desperately ill. She added: "I followed the regimen in every smallest detail, precisely according to Dr. Salisbury's direction. You know me, and you know that when I do a thing I do it thoroughly, so there is no need to say any more about that." Which only goes to show that, as the proverb has it, "One man's meat is another man's poison."

Dr. Salisbury recommends the meat diet especially in cases of tuberculosis. He finds that the predisposing cause of this disease is "vegetable fermentation." He declares that the excessive starch and sugar diet leads to the production of yeast spores and other ferments in the intestinal [Pg 99] tract, and that these are absorbed into the circulation and ultimately clog the small capillaries in the lungs. Dr. Salisbury's theory was set forth over thirty years ago, and that was before Koch had made his discovery of the tubercle bacillus. This discovery would seem to put Dr. Salisbury's theory out of court altogether; but as we physical culturists are inclined to suspect, there are causes of disease lying behind the attack of the specific bacillus. These causes are a depleted blood supply and a weakened system; and it seems to me, from what I have observed of consumptives and their diet, that Dr. Salisbury's theories fit in very well indeed with the Koch theory.

I wrote recently to Professor Chittenden to ask him what, in his opinion, would be the effects of the meat diet upon tuberculosis. He replied that he knew no reason for believing that it would be of special benefit but that the whole subject of diet in tuberculosis seemed to him to be one concerning which there was urgent need of experiment and investigation. This is unquestionably the case. I know no two physicians who seem to agree in the diets they prescribe to consumptives, and I have never met two consumptives who followed the same regimen. The general idea seems to be to stuff as much food in your system as you possibly can, especially milk and raw eggs; and [Pg 100] it seems to me quite certain that, whatever system may be correct, this system is incorrect.

This much seems to me to be clear: tuberculosis is a disease brought about by under-nourishment. It is a disease to which the poor are especially liable; and while this is undoubtedly in part due to bad air, it is also due to bad feeding. And when ignorant people wish to live cheaply, the foods they eat are the sugar and starch foods. I remember in Thoreau's "Walden" he sets forth how he lived for many months upon five or six dollars' worth of food. He does not give the amount of the food by weight, so of course we cannot tell exactly; but he gives the prices he paid, and the leading articles in his diet were flour, rice, corn-meal, molasses, sugar and lard. One is, therefore, perfectly prepared to learn that Thoreau died of consumption. And the same thing, I believe, will happen to a good many enthusiastic vegetarians of my acquaintance. They have given up meat, and they have made up for it by increasing their consumption of bread and crackers, rice and potatoes, and prepared and predigested cereals, which they eat with cream and sugar. Even when they use high proteid food, it is in some form such as beans, which contain a great deal of starch, and in a form which is difficult of digestion. As a result of this, they are[Pg 101] thin and anæmic looking—they do not seem to be able to put on flesh by means of intellectual fervor and an optimistic philosophy. The result of my meat-diet experiment has been to convince me yet more firmly that the cooked-vegetable diet is the worst diet in the world for myself. (I am content to phrase it that way, and leave it for others to find out about their own case.) There has been some agitation in vegetarian circles since the report has gone around that I have become a backslider, and have gone back to the flesh-pots. I state the facts here for what they may be worth to others. I shall never call myself a "vegetarian" again—though I shall be a vegetarian the greater part of the time.

For it should be noted, of course, that the objections which I have brought against the cooked vegetarian diet do not apply at all to the raw-food diet, which is entirely a different matter. If one lives upon nuts, whole grains boiled or shredded, salad vegetables and fruits, he does not get an excess of either starch or sugar, but a perfectly balanced dietary, every article of which is rich in natural salts—in which the starchy foods, and especially the prepared cereals, are fatally deficient. Such a diet can be followed by any person in normal health, who is leading a physically active life. I have known a number of people, old and[Pg 102] young, to start out upon this way of life without any preliminaries, and they have noted a great gain in health and efficiency, and have had no trouble of any sort. This diet is as cheap as the bean and white flour and rice diet of the ordinary "vegetarian," and it is, by all odds, the simplest and most convenient diet in the world.

I have been accustomed all my life to think of meat as a very "heavy" article of food, an article of food suited for men doing hard physical labor; it is a curious fact that the view I am setting forth here is precisely the opposite. So long as I am doing hard physical labor, whether it is walking ten miles a day, or playing tennis, or building a house, I get along perfectly upon the raw food; but when I settle down for long periods of thinking and writing—often sitting for six hours without moving from one position—I find that I need something else, and nothing has answered that purpose quite so well as beef-steak. It appears to be, so far as I am concerned, the most easily digested and most easily assimilated of foods. And because the work that I am doing seems to me to be important, I am willing to make the sacrifice of money and time and trouble which it necessitates. My diet at such times will consist of beef or chicken, shredded wheat biscuit, and a little fruit. If any one is disposed to follow my[Pg 103] example and make this experiment, I beg to call his attention especially to the fact that I name these three kinds of food, and none others; and that I mean these three kinds and none others. The main trouble with advising anybody to eat

meat is that he proceeds to eat it in the everyday world, where it means not the eating of broiled lean beef, but also of bacon and eggs, and of bread and butter, and of potatoes with cream gravy, and of rice pudding and crackers and cheese and coffee. Please do not proceed to eat these things and then hold meat-eating responsible for the consequences.

I do not for a moment wish to give the impression that I believe that meat-eating is necessary to a normally active person, or that humanity will always continue to eat meat. No invention of science can ever make meat as cheap a food as nuts and fruit, and nothing can ever make it as beautiful or attractive a food, nor as clean a food, nor as easily prepared a food. I believe that children can be brought up without knowing the taste of meat, and can be trained to lead normal and active lives from the very beginning, and can live on the raw-food diet and thrive. What I am discussing here are my own experiences, and I do not regard myself as a normal specimen of humanity, because I work a great deal harder than [Pg 104] anybody has a right to work. I do that because there are so many idle and useless people in the world at present—and some have to make martyrs of themselves, until conditions of injustice and cruelty have been done away with.