

VEGETARIANISM.

Is it Spreading and will Mankind Become Vegetarian?

(Canada Health Journal for June.)

It appears to be the belief of some that, as man in the savage state has for the most part been largely if not wholly carnivorous, he will, with the progress of civilization, become entirely vegetarian, or use only the products of animals, as eggs and milk, with vegetable food. There is no doubt that the tendency to vegetarianism is increasing; and it is, too, something more than a 'fad.' In practice at the present time there are two great principles involved in it, which are well worthy the attention of the true social reformer—one is that of economy, the other, that a vegetarian diet lessens the desire in the human organism, which is so universal and obstinate, for stimulants. Moreover, some of the highest medical authorities now recommend such a diet as the best remedy in a great many diseased and deranged conditions of the human body.

In point of economy, a diet of vegetable food is an enormous saving of expense—hence, of labor; with the poor or others, for their daily bread. It is estimated that a given acreage of wheat will feed at least ten times as many as the same acreage devoted to the growth of beef and mutton. Indeed, the advantage of a vegetable diet in point of economy is too obvious to require advocacy here.

Thousands have borne evidence to the fact that animal food increases the desire for stimulants. Anyone in the habit of using wine or other stimulants, by a little observation in regard to his own personal experience, would probably soon become convinced of this. Hence, as a temperance measure a vegetable diet stands high.

As regards a strictly vegetarian diet as a remedy in many diseased conditions of the body, we give below the words of the celebrated Anglo-French physician and physiologist, Prof. Dujardin-Bonnafant, of Paris. Not that they are particularly new at all, but from being recent and from an eminent man, and because they illustrate the best medical opinion of the day. The Professor, in a recent lecture in Paris said:—'The affections of the digestive tube or of the stomach, to which the vegetarian regimen is applicable, are numerous. This regimen, in fact, reduces to a minimum the toxins which enter the economy by the food. Remember, in fact, what I told you last year, 'a propos' of the ptomaines and leucomines. As soon as death smites the living being, and at the very instant when death appears, the ptomaines manifest their presence. At first non-toxic, they become toxic at from the fourth or fifth day which follows death, and these substances are sufficiently deleterious to promptly cause death of animals to which they are administered. Moreover, according to the animal species, these ptomaines are more or less active; thus, putrefied fish furnish a great number. As man consumes a great quantity of animal substances whose time of

killing often goes back to eight or ten days, it is easy to understand what a fruitful source of poisoning may be here found; this danger is avoided by those who adopt the vegetarian regimen.

If vegetable substances may undergo putrescent alterations, these are much less likely to take place with respect to vegetable than to animal food. Hence, this diet becomes obligatory whenever, by the bad functioning of the kidneys or digestive tube, the toxins may accumulate in the economy.

In the first rank we will place all those cases where there exists renal (kidney) insufficiency....In the dilation of the stomach by gastric neurasthenics, this same regimen also gives good results. Lastly, in the putrid diarrhoeas, the vegetarian regimen is also indicated.

But there is another point of view in connection with which this regimen gives good results. I refer to the irritation of the gastric mucous membrane. Next in dyspeptic troubles, properly so called, which result mostly from modifications in the gastric juice. Whether it be an exaggeration or an increase in the acidity of this fluid, this dietetic system enables us to cure these affections without imposing any work on the pepsin glands. Lastly, in the general diseases characterized by hyperacidity, such as the uric diathesis, we can still derive benefit from the vegetarian regimen.

To sum up then, and as the conclusion of this lecture, I would say, if from an anthropological and physiological point of view, man is omnivorous, and may, according to climates and according to his necessities, live on a flesh diet, or on a mixed diet, or on a vegetable diet, from a therapeutic point of view the latter regimen, as applied to our climates, constitutes a very important method of treatment, which is demanded in a great many gastric and renal, kidney, as well as general affections.

One sound objection to animal food is undoubtedly the retention in the fluids and tissues of the carcass at death, after being slaughtered, of a large amount of excretory matters, and which, it is probable, give rise to the toxic ptomaines so soon formed after death. These excretory matters would soon have been eliminated by the excretory organs of the animal—the kidneys, skin, liver, &c., had it not been slaughtered.

Animal food is more digestible than vegetable food, and has undoubtedly saved a great amount of digestive force in past ages, but with the advances made in the preparation, (cooking, &c.) of vegetable foods, especially of the cereals, this disadvantage in the use of a vegetarian diet may soon be wholly overcome.

As regards the nutritive value of vegetable, as compared with animal foods, we think it is now almost universally conceded by medical authorities that full nutrition for muscle, or nerve, or brain, may be obtained from the cereals, or, if not, it certainly may be from eggs and milk, which seem destined to long hold a place in the vegetarian diet. The diet of the not very distant

future, it would seem from present indications, will consist of cereals and fruits, with probably eggs and milk. The lower forms of vegetables—the more commonly termed 'vegetables'—potatoes, beets and other roots, will probably be less and less used. Even now, much less attention is given to their production than to that of cereals and fruits.

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