



The Order of the Golden Age



Peter's Vision

By Sidney H. Beard

At meetings which are held for the advocacy of natural and humane diet the lecturer is nearly always confronted by two 'questions' which appear to be regarded by their unenlightened propounders as constituting stupendous arguments in favour of human carnivorousness.

The first of these is voiced when some well-disposed, but dull-witted individual asks, "What would become of the animals if we did not eat them?" and, it is somewhat amusing to notice that he generally appears to be much disappointed, instead of being mentally relieved, when he is reminded that cattle, sheep, and pigs are bred in countless millions by artificial methods, simply for the purpose of being butchered, and that as the demand is lessened the supply will decrease.

The second question obtains much favour in 'religious' circles, and is known as 'the Peter's Vision difficulty'. It is generally advanced by some pious lover of flesh-meat with a sardonic smile of triumph, for such persons are usually unable to apprehend the fact that great principles can neither be established nor upset by the allegorical dreams of any man - even though he were an apostle who has been, according to the notions of our Romish brethren, endowed with the keys of the Heavenly Kingdom.

As there are many sincere and intelligent seekers after truth and dietic morality in the Churches, who have been mentally perturbed by the narrative of Peter's dream, I should like to offer some remarks which may enable such to realise that this story, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, instead of being a "difficulty," constitutes a most useful weapon in the armoury of the Food-Reformer who is seeking to prove that bloodless, natural, and humane diet is the only proper food for those who seek to live in accord with the teaching and spirit of the Christ.

It is well to read the account of the dream as it is given in the latest and, apparently, the most accurate translation of the Christian scriptures that is, as yet, obtainable. This is known as the "Twentieth Century New Testament", and it is a translation into modern English direct from the purest original Greek text (that of Bishop Westcott and Dr. Hort) consequently it may be considered more reliable than the 'Authorised Version' which is only a translation into antiquated English made from an intermediate Latin translation.

Here we find it recorded (Ch.x, v.9) that

"Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about mid-day. There he became hungry and wanted something to eat; but whilst it was being prepared he fell into a trance, and saw that the sky was open, and that something like a great sail was descending, let down by its four corners towards the earth. In it were all kinds of quadrupeds, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice came to him, "Peter, get up, kill something and eat it."

"No, Sir, I cannot," Peter answered, "for I have never eaten anything 'defiled' and impure."

I would ask my readers to note two points of special importance; (1) that the creatures let down in the sail were those whose bodies always contain blood (no 'fish' being mentioned), and (2) that Peter, even in response to what he may have regarded as an angelic voice, emphatically declared, that, he could not eat such flesh-food because he had never eaten anything defiled or impure.

In chapter xi, verse 7, when Peter is narrating the story of his vision to the Jews at Jerusalem in order to explain to them how he was, by means of it, taught to recognise that Jewish bigotry and exclusiveness were contrary to the Divine Will, and that the Gentile converts were to be regarded as brethren who were entitled to a full share of the blessings of the Gospel, he accentuates this point by declaring that he responded to the Voice, "No, Sir, I cannot, for nothing defiled or impure has ever passed my lips."

Thus we learn from Peter's own emphatic declaration that he was a life-abstainer from the flesh of animals, and that, consequently, he had not participated in the orthodox observances of the Jews on the occasion of the Passover Feasts.

The fact that Peter, like Matthew, James (the brother of our Lord) and James the Apostle, never ate animal flesh - and we have the clearest testimony on this point concerning these three apostles in the writings of the early Christian historians Hegesippus, Clemens and Augustine - goes a long way towards demolishing the assumption which is often

advanced by a certain class of theologians: - that the Master would, as a pious Jew, certainly have partaken of the Paschal lamb at the annual feasts.

As there is no positive evidence that He ever did so, and as we have no reason to believe that these four apostles were other than pious Jews, and as direct Jewish testimony has affirmed that in those days conscientious objectors to flesh-food (who were very numerous in Palestine) were allowed to observe the Paschal Feast at a table from which the lamb was excluded, this aforesaid assumption breaks down.

And with it the unsupported false idea (which is so prevalent in the Churches) that the lamb was eaten upon the occasion of the 'Last Supper' is demolished.

For, in the light of this evidence concerning the four apostles, it is well-nigh impossible for any enlightened truth-seeker to believe that the flesh of the lamb would have been introduced on the night of the Supper, seeing that it was held on the first day of the Feast, when unleavened bread would constitute the appropriate fare. John's testimony on this point is distinct and conclusive, for he shows in three separate places (Ch. xviii, v. 28, Ch. xix, v. 14 and 31), that the evening of the Supper was on the day preceding that of the Passover.

I would specially call attention to the fact that Peter apparently never wavered in his conviction that blood-stained food was defiled and impure, for we are told that he puzzled over the meaning of this vision - evidently feeling sure that the words "what God hath purified, you must not call defiled" could not possibly have a literal reference to the corpses of the creatures which he had seen.

And the interpretation which he himself wisely put upon the words that he heard in the dream, is clearly shown by his affirmation to Cornelius and his friends, to whom he stated:

"You are aware without my telling you, that it is forbidden for a Jew to be on intimate, or even visiting, terms, with a foreigner; yet, as far as I am concerned, God has shown me that I ought never to call any man 'defiled' or impure. That was why I came when I was sent for, without raising any objection."

In the light of Peter's distinct affirmation how can we avoid the conclusion that he must have been a life-abstainer from blood-stained food? I cannot do so, and it is my personal opinion that if the sources of information which are available to us concerning the other immediate followers of the Master were not so fragmentary, we should find that every one of them held the same convictions as Peter did on this subject.

On the testimony of Philo and other historians we know that Palestine, Greece, and Egypt contained at this time, a very large number of colonies of earnest seekers after Truth and the higher life, such as the Essenes, Ebionites, Nazarenes, and Therapeutae, and it is recorded that they abstained from flesh-food and lived upon the fruits of the earth.

As it is affirmed in the Talmud that Jesus sojourned for many years in Egypt (where He would doubtless have associated with such kindered souls as the Therapeutae), and as His teaching is in closest harmony with that of the Essenes amongst whom He had so many friends, and as the whole spirit of His life and message is utterly discordant with wanton butchery or the defilement of the human temple by food which is only appropriate for beasts of prey, those who study this matter without prejudice, and who possess more than an elementary measure of spiritual insight, will find it impossible to tolerate the idea that the First-born amongst the Sons of God descended at any time to that level of human degeneracy which is characterized by sanguinary carnivorousness.

That manner of living which the early Christian leaders found to be most conducive to soul-culture and spiritual clear-vision, and most in harmony with the divine attributes of Purity, Beneficence, Compassion and Love, will be found to be best for the modern Christians of to-day. And until it is adopted, the people of Christendom will continue to be characterized to a lamentable extent by cruelty, carnality, soul-blindness, pugnacity and disease.

Let the leaders of the modern Churches look to this matter of national pollution, so that the religion of Jesus may not continue to be misrepresented or disgraced in the eyes of the so-called 'heathen' of other lands, and so that the great stumbling-block to the work of humanizing and Christianizing the world may be removed.

Whilst Christian lands resound with the unheeded cries of millions of defenceless sentient creatures who are being maltreated, massacred, or tortured in order that the gustatory degeneracy, vanity or selfishness of heartless men and women may be pandered to, we need not wonder that the religious exercises which are performed by these same men and women in our churches and chapels should be regarded with scornful levity by many level-headed outside observers.

A few weeks ago I attended a debate on the subject of 'Vivisection,' at a Y.M.C.A. The practice of inflicting cruelties of the most appalling nature upon helpless sentient animals was actually defended and upheld by the only Christian Minister present, by two such unworthy and puerile arguments as the following, viz.:- That human beings may derive some benefit from these atrocities, and that God has set us an example concerning cruel sacrifices by ordering the Jews to kill thousands of animals as offerings to Him. In spite of unanswerable medical testimony concerning the misleading and useless nature of vivisectional experiments on animals being tendered by a medical expert, and appeals for justice and mercy being made on behalf of the victims, (by two fruitarians who were present), this assembly of Christian young men passed a vote in favour of the continuance of vivisection and then applauded their own action instead of realising their shame.

I only mention this circumstance to show how the consumption of blood-stained food can blind the eyes and harden the heart of those who consume it, for in non-carnivorous countries, such as Burmah or India, it would be difficult to find amongst the unperverted natives any sane upholder of the legalised torture of animals.

Well may Peter and thousands of his contemporaries have regarded such food as 'impure,' and have refused to demoralize their souls and bodies by participating in its consumption. And well did the first Council of the Apostles act when they decreed to the Gentile converts that abstinence from 'blood' was a "supremely necessary thing."

For until Christian men and women cease to be polluted by participation in this wholesale outpouring of innocent blood which is daily taking place, until pagan ethics cease to prevail in our midst, and until 'Humaneness' is taught in our churches to be an essential part of Christianity, there can be but slight justification for expecting any appreciable degree of social amelioration, or the dawning of a Golden Age wherein Peace, Health and Spirituality shall prevail upon Earth.

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