



# The Order of the Golden Age



## Is there a Divinely Righteous Aspect of the Food Question?

By Rev. H.J. Williams

The people who had the opportunity of personally addressing the Lord Christ, asked Him apparently trivial, unimportant questions as to ceremonial washings, and complained that His disciples were very lax in these matters. Also, the Pharisees asked Him how it was that His disciples followed not either the customs of the Pharisaic party nor that of John the Baptist.

If we take the New Testament as the Urim and the Thummin on the heart of our great High Priest, we may approach Him as His disciples of old, and question the Master, through the Holy Spirit, whether or not it is consistent that His disciples and people should slaughter highly-organised and sensitive animals to obtain their food?

The importance of meats and foods bulked largely in the old dispensation, and the great lawgiver of the Jewish faith strictly defined what flesh foods were lawful or permissible and what were not so. This was apparently very necessary, as the earliest races were exceedingly cruel in their food-habits, as well as often cannibals, and inclined to bloodthirsty pursuits. Moses endeavoured to build up a pure race, and to lay again the foundation of a new humanity on a higher ideal of life, and to rebuild its ruined temple with fair stones, for its structure was rotten with blood and lust and animal selfishness without relief. The Levitical law emphasised God's lordship over man in the use he should make of the lower animals, by limiting his power and taking care that the creatures should Rest as well as man. There is not much said, but what is said of consideration for the other animals is on the path of progress. It was enough to remind man that both owned a common law.

There is not as much as one might have expected recorded of the sayings of Jesus Christ as regards the treatment of the animals. Doubtless much has been omitted, as St. John tells us that if all his Master had spoken had been written many libraries would not contain "His sayings."

In the Pauline epistles the subject of food is touched upon once or twice, but rather in respect to those who believed in the reality of the demons or gods worshipped by the heathen. Much of the flesh used in the cities had passed through the temples of idolaters and had been dedicated or set apart by the priests of their various gods with some form of consecration. Many Christians were so "scrupulous" (or "weak," as the Authorised Version renders the word in translation, inadequately for our day,) as to be much hurt and scandalised at the very idea of a brother Christian daring to eat such flesh. St. Paul said, for his part he would neither eat flesh nor drink wine if thereby his brother (his scrupulous brother) should be troubled and distressed in his mind. He valued human souls higher than his preference for beef or mutton as food or wine as his beverage. The special idolatrous difficulty no longer exists, it is true, but surely the larger spiritual interpretation is for us to-day, as much or more, than it was 2,000 years ago.

The Christian age in which we live has been quickened by God's Spirit through the teachings of His newer messages, to consider the solidarity of life as well as the psychological results of certain food-habits, whether used in moderation or immoderately, and also the unhappy effects in too many cases, on the slaughtermen and others connected with the business.

Behind the food called flesh and beyond the festive board are the gruesome scenes of ten thousand slaughter-houses, and the patient oxen and the harmless gentle sheep giving up their lives in Niagaras of blood. No one outside the circle of professional slaughterers considers it decent or proper to even know or think about their

"foods" in the "raw state!" Society condemns itself in that which it allows or sets others to carry out for its "palate pleasure."

In respect to the food vegetarians recommend, none can be hurt or "offended." The garden with its crops and its fruit trees: the waving fields of grain - the blood of the grape is the only blood spilt - the rustle of the ripe corn falling is the only sound where harvesters nobly and gladly toil, and all is a picture of peace. Contrast this with the awful scene of the big slaughter-houses, or with the Chicago inferno, and the most cynical must see which ought to be man's ideal field of labour.

Then there is another view of the question, St. Paul's, that of causing "stumbling." There are thousands of men and women, whose conscience is worthy of tender usage, who are injured by the callous indifference of Christians and Christian ministers in this respect. It pains them beyond words this deadness to the voices of compassion and pity, and thereby many have been driven out of all the fellowship of any visible church.

Looking around on so much that Christian society accepts, and even praises and blesses, the words of the Master must apply to many of those who are His zealous followers: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Fruitarianism appeals to many who are not strictly called "Christians," by reason of a certain refinement and justice in them, which shrinks from the course and the unjust, and is attracted to all that is lovely and of good report.

Many inquirers say, "if the New Testament forbade the use of flesh food we would give it up."

Permit me to remind them of "warfare," a thing altogether abhorrent to any but the crudest ideas of Christianity, a crime condemned and prohibited by our Master in these memorable words to St. Peter, "Put up thy sword into its sheath, all that take the sword shall perish by the sword," or that still more comprehensive and imperative word about "love," and our showing our discipleship by our love, our devotion, and by our forgiveness of our enemies, and the substitution of the idea of love instead of force. In reference to war, is it not notorious that for at least 1,700 years Christians have been eminent for continual strife and bloodshed?

If there had been a plain command as to flesh food, is it not probable that the command or recommendation would have been explained away as only suitable to that day or for a "hot climate"?

St. Paul tells us it is possible to make eating and drinking show forth God's glory. Surely it is impossible to conceive the shambles of Christendom as contributory to the religious welfare of the race, not to speak of their physical well-being! What a terrible responsibility to throw upon God in making Him the patron of the shambles, and the friend of Mammon worship, and the patron of war, and of its red fields of carnage.

We believe that Jesus Christ lived a simple peasant's life, that He used no products of the slaughter-houses. It is for our opponents to prove the reverse - that He was a flesh-eater and an approver of the slaughter-house - to prove this from the historic records or from contemporary history.

The fact that Christ our Lord was always on the side of the greatest and most wide-reaching mercy makes our position strong against all who honour His name. The fact of the silence of Jesus Christ about many of the enormities of His own day, as slavery, torture, and a hundred other crimes, surely does not mean He approved!

The "Permissions" of the Christian church to-day run counter to the simple commands of Christ. Is it a time for His followers to seem to consent to such violations of His Law by their silence?

We thank Heaven that there has been for the last sixty years a gathering consensus of the highest Christian opinion and feeling against the cruelties of the slaughter-house, the dens of the vivisectionists, the barbarity of sport and of war? From whom do these words come and of Whose spirit do they testify? Does the spirit of Christ speak in this thought of a Christian poet or not? -

"No flocks that range the valley free

To slaughter I condemn;

Taught by the power that pities me

I learn to pity them."

None who follow Christ's spirit of mercy will fail of a due reward. Love and more love, and the deepening and well-grounded assurance of mercy from Him who is the Supreme Arbiter of man's destiny, and whose noblest title is "The Most Merciful."

"Who in Life's battle grim doth stand  
Shall bear Hope's tender blossoms into  
the Silent Land." - Longfellow.

---

From the January 1903 edition of *Health, Food and Cookery* - published in Glasgow. #