

healthful living

IS YOUR STOMACH IN PROPORTION?

By
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I have discovered how to gain the rapt attention of certain people who become drowsy in the consideration of real spiritual food. Start talking about carnal food! Immediately they become starry-eyed zealots, all aglow with a real religious fervor over the stomach and what goes or should go into it.

It is terrible to see a man with a stomach that is out of proportion to the shape of his body. It degrades the physical image of God. But it is even worse when people get the stomach out of proportion in their thinking. This degrades the moral image of God in the human mind.

I am reminded of an incident on the corner of a city street where a preacher was trying to give the gospel to the promiscuous crowd. The preacher was troubled by a Communist agitator who kept interrupting with utter disdain, "But that won't fill your stomach . . . that won't fill your stomach . . . that won't fill your stomach." Finally a bystander, becoming weary of the monotony of the agitator, silenced him with one apt comment: "All right, old fellow," he said, "but we are not all stomach."

For far too many, health reform is all stomach, and religion is all stomach. The stomach has its place in human anatomy. It has its place in health reform and in practical religion. But as we observed a moment ago, there is nothing so unsightly as a stomach out of proportion. Although most of our readers will not need instruction about keeping their stomachs in proportion to the rest of their anatomy, maybe some of us could profit by considering how people can get their stomachs out of proportion in their religious experience.

1. Love of Stomach

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21. We are not meant to have our heart in our stomach. Paul wrote of the Cretians, "whose God is their belly." Philipians 3:19. Their gluttonous habits revealed what their god was. But stomach worship can be manifested in ways other than gluttony. There are earnest, religious "health reformers" whose thoughts are never far from their stomach. They talk hard and long about food and spend an enormous amount of time and effort getting what they think are suitable things to put in their stomach. They spend much of their life planning for, thinking of and caring for their stomachs. The problem is that they love their stomachs like the Cre-

tians, but their love for it merely manifests itself in a different way. The worst part about it is that they invest their love for it with a cloak of religious zeal so that the whole food subject becomes a reproach to religion. Such people need to remember the words of Jesus, "Life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment." Luke 12:23. The Lord rebuked this continual anxiety as to what we shall eat. He said that this was a sin that belonged to the Gentiles. The Christian life has a much higher, worthier goal and subject for contemplation than an organ that is part of the vile body that soon must be changed at the coming of the Lord. Paul said, "Food does not commend us or bring us any nearer to God." 1 Corinthians 8:8, Expanded Translation. Again he declared, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Romans 14:17.

2. Compensation

Human personality indulges in a strange psychological quirk which psychologists call "compensation." For instance, the boss dictatorially takes it out on his employees to compensate for being a hen-pecked husband at home. Religious distortions are forms of spiritual compensation. A man suffering frustration and personal defeat in his inner spiritual life is a desperate man. For such a man health

reform can be a lifesaver to a drowning soul. In such a case, as true heart piety declines, zeal for health reform increases. At home he may be moody, angry, unkind, prayerless, mean, critical; "But no matter," says the ego, "I am most particular in what I eat." He may proudly quote the following statement: "If a man can overcome his appetite, he can overcome anything." The problem is that he uses his preoccupation with appetite as a *substitute* for overcoming almost everything. This is pure Phariseeism, the worst kind of religious hypocrisy.

3. A Barometer of Spiritual Progress

Some people make the grave mistake of using their stomach as a barometer of their spiritual progress. Our eating may be an index to our spiritual state. It may also be an index to our spiritual pride. Before me is a letter of a stomach worshiper. It says, "What people eat is the best indication of their spiritual progress. Lowest on the ladder are the meat eaters. A step higher are the lacto-ovo vegetarians. Higher yet are the pure vegetarians. But highest of all, going rapidly on to perfection and the seal of God, are the pure fruitarians." The trouble is that this poor soul sees itself on the very top of the ladder, looking disdainfully down on those who eat roots, eggs, or worse yet, meat. Extolling what is thought to be the mighty victories of the

cross, this food zealot continues, "I had a terrible struggle giving up potatoes, but the Lord gave me the victory." But all these so-called food "victories" are being used as a barometer of spiritual progress, blinding the eyes of this person to the sins of pride, unkindness, criticism and intolerance that raise their ugly heads all through the letter.

It can be a very dangerous thing for people to make a ladder of dietetic "advancement" and then make that ladder synonymous with the ladder of sanctification. Some well-meaning people have done this, thinking that such things must be urged as part of the Awakening message. But such "pietistic" delusions have neither part nor parcel in the Awakening message. Dietetic habits are often an index to spiritual progress. But remember, they may be an index to spiritual pride.

4. Imputation of Moral Qualities to Food

It is an appalling fallacy to impute moral quality to food per se. Jesus stated an absolute truth when He said that man is not morally defiled by putting anything into his stomach. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Matthew 15:11. Paul said, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." Romans 14:14. Neither roots, eggs,

mushrooms, duck, rabbit, beef nor pork is morally unclean. There is and can be only one morally unclean thing in this whole world—the human heart.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to health reform is this false idea of imputing moral evil to things external from the human heart. Once a person imputes a moral quality to any food, he is on the high road to legalism, and there is no stopping place on this road until he falls into the great pit of fanaticism.

I once met a person who said, "I would rather die than eat an egg." It may be a good thing to stop eating eggs for certain reasons, but to impute some sort of moral contamination to a chemical mixture of any kind is religious foolishness. Another person makes the fruitarian diet a matter of religious principle and carries it so far that she would say, "I would rather die than eat a potato." Or another gives up meat and says, "I would rather die than eat meat."

I met an earnest brother who affirmed that if he were placed in a position where meat was the only food that would keep him alive, he would choose to die rather than violate his conscience. I asked him if he would take a blood transfusion to save his life. He said he would. "Well," I said to him, "don't you realize that taking a blood transfusion is far more risky and more impure than eating flesh. A blood

transfusion goes right into the body. It is taking a drink of blood directly into the veins. If putting flesh into the digestive tract is morally defiling in itself, then putting blood directly into the body would be much more of a moral defilement."

We should rather die than consent to a wrong act. For instance, it is better to die than to tell a lie. We should choose death rather than worship idols, break the Sabbath, commit adultery or steal. The sixth commandment certainly embraces true health reform. It commands us to preserve our lives. The Bible says, "A living dog is better than a dead lion." Ecclesiastes 9:4. It is sinful to mutilate the body, but not if mutilation is necessary to save life. We will cut off a limb if life is at stake. It is wrong to drink strong drink, but the Bible says, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish." Proverbs 31:6.

Right now I could not eat meat with a clear conscience. There is better food available, and the Lord has given me instruction that meat is not the best food for the body temple because of its effect on the mental and moral powers of the human organism. For me to eat meat is sin, not because there is any moral uncleanness in meat, but because eating it would show that I do not love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. It would be an act of serving appetite rather than serving the Lord. The defilement

would not be in the meat, but in my attitude toward the meat. So Paul said, "There is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Romans 14:14.

On the other hand, it might become a sin not to eat meat. The chance is exceedingly remote, but we must see the principle. If it chanced that meat was the only thing that would preserve life, then I must take it for conscience sake in the same way as I would take a blood transfusion or that Elijah gratefully ate the flesh brought by the ravens. It is not meat that has moral quality, but my attitude toward the meat.

5. Imputation of Life and Health From Food

God gave the children of Israel manna when they were in the wilderness. The Bible says that it was angels' food. Angels do not die, but the Israelites ate angels' food and still died. They died in the wilderness because they did not learn the lesson in the manna. The Scripture says that God humbled them and gave them manna that they might learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. But Israel did not learn that. They did not see that they lived by life from God. They thought that life and health came primarily from food.

So today people impute life, health and healing to food. Some of these same people are poor specimens of good health. As God gave manna to Israel, so He gave health reform to us (*Medical Ministry*, p. 267); not that we might impute health to food, but that we might be humbled to impute everything we have to God. He says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Exodus 15:26. But we are so inclined to brag about some food or some herb as the secret of health. The whole approach is wrong—sinfully wrong. So we are dying in this wilderness the same as other people. With all the light on health reform, we are not much ahead of a moderate living "Egyptian." We get most of the same diseases. The startling part about it is the fact that among the leading health and food advocates within the Advent Movement there is so much sickness and disease. Not a few have died of cancer. Often members of their own families have not thrived on their programs. I submit that they can eat the best food that this earth can give, yet these diseases of the Egyptians will remain.

We must learn to impute health to God. Christ is the Tree of Life. He is the living Bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. Oh, there is more health reform in John, chapter 6, than in all the food

which enthusiasts have ever dreamed of. He who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the Son of God has the power of everlasting life coursing through him. Read Isaiah 58. It is the greatest health prescription for the Advent Movement—the greatest! It does not promise that after we follow certain dietetic rules, we will have good health. All who promise health on condition of following a certain diet are not telling the truth. But Isaiah 58 tells us that when our lives are filled with the Spirit of Jesus so that we do the works and live the life of Jesus, then our health shall spring forth speedily. There is need of a great reformation in our whole concept of health reform. We must be humbled to build on the true foundation. There is more health in being baptized in the unselfish spirit of heaven than in all the medicines that man can discover.

Perhaps the greatest book in the Bible on the subject of health is the book of Proverbs. It is full of the subject of health. If you want an interesting exercise and a thrilling study, read the book through, marking every statement that gives the secret of health. It puts the stomach in the right proportion. It bears out what Ellen G. White says: "Sickness of the mind prevails everywhere. Nine tenths of the diseases from which men suffer have their foundation here."—*Counsels on Health*, p. 324.