



CHAPTER 15: On Food

My DEAR COMRADES,

Eating and drinking have so much to do with the comfort, health, and usefulness of most people, whether in youth, manhood, or old age, that I cannot pass the subject by without offering some suggestions with respect to it, however imperfect they may be. If it is suggested that Religion cannot be brought down to the doings of the table without affecting its dignity, I shall reply in the words of the Apostle Paul, "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory Of God." That is, every meal of which we partake should be a Sacrament, and every action we perform a part of your Religion.

To help my readers to bring their Salvationism to bear upon such ordinary and yet necessary Occupations as eating their breakfasts, dinners, teas, and the like, is my purpose in this Letter. I am, I must confess, not a little doubtful as to the success that may attend my effort, but I will do my duty, and leave you, my Comrades, to judge of its value and utility.

1. Eating and drinking are closely associated with the ability to think. Every intelligent man knows that Food, unsuitable in quantity or quality, or taken at unsuitable times, has a bad effect upon his brain. It clips the wings of imagination, dulls the perception, darkens memory, depresses the spirits, and clothes the future with gloom. Many a bad speech, and bad bargain too, has come of what is often called a good dinner.

2. A man's Food has much to do with the exercise of his gifts. It affects his ability to sing, to pray, to reason, to talk, or to lead. A hearty meal of the plainest fare, or a very small quantity of richer food, will often clothe my soul with torpor, make my brain feel like a log of wood, and render speaking or writing a positive torture. I have no doubt that it is so, more or less, with numbers of other speakers, some of these being either ignorant of the fact, or too fond of the knife-and-fork business to curb their appetites for the sake of the profitable discharge of their duty.



3. Eating and drinking have much to do with the shortening of many people's lives. Drunkenness is charged with the destruction of an enormous number of victims, but I very much question whether more people do not die from over-eating than from overdrinking. I have made that remark again and again in the presence of physicians of eminence, but not one of them has ever called its accuracy in question. On the contrary, the majority have openly assented to it.

4. Eating and drinking have great influence on our spiritual experiences – oftentimes a closer connection with them than some of our Bible Readings, Prayer Meetings, our Holiness Studies, and the like. I say this without any wish to depreciate the value of those useful exercises. Many a good soul goes into the darkness of unbelief and low spirits simply through eating more food than is necessary. Self-indulgence in this respect is the enemy of both faith and prayer, and no doubt this is the reason that the Bible, and especially Jesus Christ, so often couple prayer and fasting together. Every man who really desires to walk and talk with God must be moderate and abstemious in his diet.

What, then, can I advise you on the question of your Food? First of all, I say:

1. Make a conscience of the matter. What a number of individuals I have known, during my lifetime, who, though they would not on any account sin against their neighbour by injuring his person, will regularly sin against their own bodies by eating and drinking what they know will injure them!

But it is asked, "What must we eat and drink?"

This question might be preceded by another, of equal or still greater importance, and that is, "What shall we avoid?" I answer:

2. Do not take any intoxicants. I need not say this to Salvationists, for I am sure they could not drink the liquor in any shape or form that brings so much sin and misery to the world, even if there were no prohibitory rule on the question. Nor need I give any reasons for offering the same advice to anybody else; and yet I will call your attention to two or three.



(a) You will not be any healthier or stronger for using intoxicating drinks.

(b) You may be a great deal worse for taking them, seeing that, even though you take them in moderation, they may lead you on to excessive drinking.

(e) If you take your intoxicants in moderation yourselves, your children, or those about you may, through your example, or through partaking of them at your table, contract that appetite for the drunkard's drink which will carry them to the drunkard's grave, and the drunkard's Hell. I remember hearing of a young man, who died a drunkard's death in great agony, who said that he acquired the taste for brandy by draining the glasses that came from his grandfather's table.

3. There must be no Tobacco in any form; whether smoked, snuffed, or chewed.

4. There must be no Opiates, whether in drops, drafts, pills, or pipe.

5. There must be no Sweetmeats; that is, as a habit for adults. The little children and the boys and girls may have a few chocolates, and the like, now and then, but men and women should put such childish things away.

6. There must be no Pickles or other fancy Condiments; or, at any rate, as few as possible.

7. There should be nothing that will disagree with you, however palatable, or strongly recommended, or however common its use may be by those around you, which you have reason to believe will not agree with you afterwards.

Let me look for a moment at what may be taken.

1. Coffee, Tea, Cocoa, or other hot drinks, may be used in strict moderation. Tea is, in my opinion, the safest of the catalogue, and will be found adapted to the largest number of constitutions. But that, I say, only in moderation. Many well-meaning people have ruined their health by foolish and excessive tea-drinking. They are tea-drunkards.



2. Animal food should not be taken, at most, more than once a day. There are multitudes of men and women who would be wiser, healthier, happier, and holier without meat altogether. I recommend everybody who has not made the experiment of total abstinence from flesh meat in every form to do so at once. Give it a month's trial.

The quantity of food has almost as much to do with health as the quality. Instead of everlastingly finding fault with the food, it would be a good plan if the people who suffer from indigestion, headaches, and the like would only see how they got along with one half, or even a fourth, of the quantity usually taken.

There are few subjects on which greater delusions prevail than the amount of Food that is necessary to maintain life in health and vigour. "You must eat more," is the common counsel to the invalid. "The brain must be fed; the nervous energy must be fed; the whole system must be fed. You cannot get on without a liberal supply of good, nourishing food." And so people eat and eat, and still eat more and more, till poor overtaxed nature breaks down, and health is lost forever.

The question turns then, on what is good, nourishing Food, and what constitutes a sufficient supply of it. There is an illustration I often give which, I think, settles the matter. Anyway, it does to my satisfaction. When a house is building, an adequate supply of the various kinds of materials of which it is being constructed must be furnished. Quantities of bricks and timber, and stones and slates, and lime and lead, and I know not what else, must be brought along day by day. They will all be wanted for the foundations, the walls, the floors, the roofs, and the other parts of the building. But when the house is finished, painted, papered, and completed in every respect, all that will be needed will be the material necessary to meet the wear and tear of it from time to time.

Even so with the earthly tabernacle in which for a season we are called to dwell. From infancy up to maturity – while the house is building – considerably larger supplies of Food are required than are needed later on, although the feeding of children can be overdone, and gormandising habits created, that will curse the man or the woman of the future. If the Food is simple and substantial the children should have as much of it



as their healthy appetites crave. Bone and sinew, and muscle and nerve, and brain, and all the other wonderful substances, which together constitute the human edifice, have to be made.

But when the man has reached his full growth, all that is required in this "house, as in the other, will be sufficient material to meet the wear and tear, that is the waste, which is constantly taking place.

It is said, however, that, unlike the habitations built of wood and stone, this house of flesh ought to entirely renew itself every seven years. Be that as it may, I hardly see that the argument affords a good excuse for extravagant eating, seeing that half an ounce of suitable Food extra over the amount required to feed the working force of the day, will furnish sufficient material to entirely remake a man of twenty stone weight during the seven years the process is in progress.

In eating remember, then, that Nature requires only a certain quantity of support, and that having extracted that amount from the Food supplied her, she rejects the remainder. It follows, therefore, that only that particular quantity of nourishment which is turned to good account is of any real benefit to the system. All over and beyond this, only necessitates so much extra work and fatigue for the organs that have to get rid of the surplus. That extra labour produces indigestion which invariably leads to lassitude, and then to almost every other disease to which the human system is subject.

"But what about a good appetite? Is not that an indication of the quantity of Food nature needs?" "Yes; perhaps it is in a perfectly healthy individual, but in an unhealthy individual it is frequently the opposite. The amount of Food a man takes is usually a mere question of habit. Because he takes more than he requires one day he fancies he requires the same amount the next. The day after he not only takes the little that was beyond the need of the day before, but a little extra still. And so he goes on taking a little more than is required, and a little more, the appetite increasing all the time until it becomes a positive disease.

The endless variety in Food, the different ways in which it is served up, together with



the numberless appetizing things taken with it, such as pickles, relishes, seasonings, sauces, and the like, all lead people to eat more than is good for them.

I recommend you to throw the modern fanciful methods of cooking overboard, spread your table with Food prepared after a simple fashion, and your appetite will soon prove itself a safe end agreeable guide. In other words, bring your palate to your Food instead of your Food to your palate; but even then appetite will want watching, and the advice of the Apostle be found essential to health and well-being, "Let your moderation be known unto all men."

If the question is asked as to the best time for meals, I should say you must eat at regular intervals, and those times not too near together. The system of taking four substantial meals per day – breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper – with bits and bites between, that so commonly prevails with the Britisher, must be woefully injurious. The three square meals of the American, consisting of breakfast taken at eight O'clock, dinner at one, tea at six, and nothing after, is preferable to that. The French plan, of a piece of bread and butter and a cup of coffee on rising (which is usually early) a luncheon at twelve, and a dinner at six, is, I think, the most preferable of the three. Indeed, it is an open question whether we should not all of us be better for giving the stomach a complete rest during the early hour of the day. "Woe," said the wise man, "to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!"

If a man discovers how much Food he really requires, and rigidly confines himself to that quantity, I do not, however, think the hour of the day when it is taken is of the first importance. Nature will deal with it satisfactorily.

To assist the process of digestion, Food should be taken slowly. One reason for the long and vigorous life of Mr. Gladstone is said to have been the care with which he masticated his Food. It is reported – whether correctly or not, I do not know – that he gave thirty-two chews to every separate piece of Food he put into his mouth!

But, however that may be, there can be no question that a great many people do eat too rapidly. The food disappears off their plates like magic. Nervous people, full of energy and plans and work, or when occupied with an interesting conversation, are



very apt to fall into this snare. Carried away by their thoughts and feelings, they forget for the moment, all their good notions about mastication; and so by their very energy in taking it, they effectually defeat the object for which their Food is taken.

Anatomists tell us that, to be of the greatest benefit to the system, Food must be pulled to pieces, and completely ground up by the teeth. It must be thoroughly chewed, and that for the following reasons:

1. It lessens the labour of the digestive organs which have to reduce the Food to a pulp, during the first stage of the process of making it into blood and bone and muscle. When the duty of mastication is neglected, or only discharged imperfectly, the amount of work imposed on the stomach is doubled or trebled, and, consequently, the task is not so well done.
2. In chewing the Food, a certain fluid, essential to the work of digestion, is poured forth from what are called the salivary glands. Thorough mastication not only secures a sufficient amount of this fluid, but properly mixes it with the Food, thus assisting the process of digestion still further. To eat slowly and carefully is, therefore, necessary. It is better to take liquids after eating the solid food. They should not be mixed together in the mouth. If the liquid unites with the dry Food there is much less chance of the important fluid to which I have just referred being added in sufficient quantity.