

Empirical Vegetarianism by W. Wybergh

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AMONG all the side-shows (to speak somewhat colloquially) of Theosophy, there is perhaps none which so soon and so directly impresses its importance upon the neophyte as the question of vegetarianism and total abstinence, and in some form or other it seems destined to dog his footsteps long after he has, in practice, decided for himself whether he will or will not give up his conventional diet. For, to a serious student, this bare, broad question, however he answers it, appears to be but the point of departure for a number of trains of thought which, if he follows them up, speedily lead him into the wilderness of the half-known and the totally unknown.

By way of a preface, I must ask pardon of my readers if there appears to be a good deal of the personal element in this article. I write in a spirit of enquiry, in the hope of provoking a reply from some more advanced student. In South Africa, whence I write, Theosophy is still in its infancy, there are no older students at hand to refer to, and I have consulted without success all the literature on the subject which I have been able to lay hands upon, including, I think, most of that which has been published by the Theosophical Publishing Society. My difficulties may perhaps be partly due to personal idiosyncrasies, but I think that they are at any rate partly inherent in the subject and therefore of interest to others. If I use my own experience as an illustration, it is partly because one is on safer ground in doing so, and partly in the hope that perhaps this little bit of practical and autobiographical psychology may be of some interest, or at any rate that it may arouse some sympathy for my benighted condition.

To begin with, I should say that I practise both vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol, and have not the slightest desire to do otherwise, except occasionally, in order to save inconvenience to myself or to others. In this particular case it is not that the spirit is willing but the flesh weak, for both spirit and flesh are perfectly willing, so that I fear that it is the intellect that is weak, or at any rate is unable to be convinced; in short I am unable to justify the faith that is in me either to myself or to others.

The stock arguments in favour of the practice divide themselves naturally under two heads: on the one hand the appeal to our love of animals and the sacredness of life, in effect that eating flesh is forbidden because it involves killing, and killing is bad ; and on the other hand the statement that abstinence is necessary if we would "purify" our vehicles and make them into better channels for the life of higher planes to flow through.

Speaking broadly, the first set of arguments appear to me invalid, and the second set, while perfectly valid, and corroborated by my own practical experience as far as it goes, do not seem to me to have been worked out in detail, even in the published works of Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater, in such a manner as to carry intellectual conviction by a real explanation of what "purification" means, and *how* it is that abstinence from meat, rather than, let us say, from bread, brings about such purification.

I am reduced, therefore, to the very lame statement that I am a vegetarian and total abstainer because it appears to suit me, and because certain people in whom I have confidence have told me that I ought to be; whereas I should like *to* feel, as the advocates of the practice are apparently happy enough to do, that it was in support of some grand principle, and that the ensuing purification of the vehicle could be explained to the scoffer as, for instance, one explains the removal of dirt by the chemical action of soap, and not merely by recourse to "experimentum in corpore vili".

I have said that the arguments resting on love for animals and respect for life appear on the whole invalid to me, and I will endeavour to explain how this is. I do not think I am open to the charge of callousness, in fact I believe myself to be a very humane man. At any rate I have an intense dislike of causing pain to man or beast, indeed the sight or knowledge of suffering in others causes me the most acute nervous distress; yet I cannot say that physical life appears to me a very important thing, or that the deprivation of it can be considered a calamity. After all: "He who regardeth this as a slayer, and he who thinketh he is slain, both of them are ignorant".

If there is one thing that I seem to myself to have learned from Theosophical teaching and study, it is that death is a matter of indifference, and no calamity. Theosophy, while removing, I hope for ever, the fear of death for myself, has also removed the idea of any peculiar sanctity attaching even to human life in general. Life, my own included, seems to me a thing to be weighed in the balance, *pari passu* with any other consideration, or thrown into the scales when necessary for the attainment of any other object.

I see no reason, for instance, to regret my advocacy of a war which cost thousands of lives (some given willingly, some most unwillingly), but which was necessary in order to attain to certain results which *seemed to me* — rightly or wrongly, more important than many lives. The correctness or otherwise of my judgment does not affect the argument, any more than does the correctness or otherwise of the judgment of those who think a flesh diet useful to the maintenance of their health.

Now if my attitude with regard to human life is, as I hope it is, a right and reasonable one, surely it is not unreasonable when applied to the life or the happiness and well-being of animals? If it is sometimes right to cause loss of human life in war, then surely it cannot be always wrong to deprive animals of life. Their life is surely of far less value to themselves or to the group-soul to which they belong, and there are no sorrowing relatives to consider. Those persons who think that their own health and well-being is of more consequence to the whole world than the life of a pigeon are probably not very far wrong, and if, even though they be mistaken, they think that the death of a pigeon conduces to their own well-being, they are not, it seems to me, to be condemned for killing it. On the other hand, it follows that others who, like myself, think that they are better without pigeon-pie, would be wrong in killing, and vegetarianism thus becomes a matter of individual opinion, based upon no very clear premises.

Of course the real issue is frequently, and even usually, obscured by those who appeal to compassion by the drawing of harrowing and no doubt only too true pictures of the cruelties (utterly needless and inexcusable) which are practised in slaughter-houses and in the business of the supply and transport of animals. I fully share their indignation and disgust, but the argument is not affected thereby. Is it not possible, moreover, that our clairvoyant investigators may have wrongly ascribed the effects which they

have observed on the astral plane to the actual taking of life, when they should really be ascribed to these horrible, but only incidental, cruelties ?

Again, we are told that slaughter brutalises the slaughterer, and that we have no right to acquiesce in the performance by others of actions from which we should shrink ourselves. This is a double-edged and far-reaching argument, for it is surely begging the question to say that it is the trade which produces the brutal man, and not the brutal man who makes an otherwise harmless trade brutal.

Now, as to facts, my own small experience of butchers certainly corroborates Colonel Thornton's (see "*In Defence of the Sportsman*", *Theosophical Review* for January, 1905), namely, that in moral character they do not appear to differ much from other men. My much larger experience of sportsmen (not Miss Ward's kind) is that they are to be reckoned among the most humane of my acquaintance, and that, far from becoming brutalised, the more experienced the hunter becomes, the keener he is about true sport, the less he cares for the extent of his bag, and the more he loves and respects the animals he hunts. Lest I should be accused of being loath to relinquish my favourite pursuit, and thus of being biased, I may here say that though I have been, I am no longer, a sportsman, chiefly owing to lack of time, and to other more absorbing interests, and partly owing to the same reasons which make me a vegetarian. As for the other kind (Miss Ward's kind) — the man who hunts tame animals, and breeds pheasants for the fun of knocking them over by the hundred — I should not call him a sportsman, and his proceedings appear to me not so much cruel as inane.

To return to the butcher, however, let us grant for the sake of argument that for *us* slaughter would be brutalising. I do not see that it can on that account be assumed to be wrong for the butcher, who may be, let us suppose, at a very much lower stage of evolution. It would no doubt be wrong to force a sensitive person into the trade, but surely the honest butcher, doing his duty according to his lights, is also treading the appointed path and merits neither our pity nor our condemnation. We accept from others many services which it is right for them to render and for us to accept, but which it would be wrong for us to undertake, because it is not our "job", and we have other more suitable work to do which cannot be done by others.

All that has been said so far is on the assumption that death is an evil, though a comparatively small one, but I do not think we have any right to assume that it is an evil at all. Evolution proceeds by the building up and dissolution of successive forms, but who shall say that the building up is necessary and "good", and the dissolution wanton and "evil" ? Both seem to be necessary and complementary to one another. It is said, however, that we have no right to take upon ourselves the responsibility of deciding when the form is ripe for dissolution. This, however, involves the assumption that we are the makers instead of the agents of destiny. The world is the field for countless interwoven yet independent evolutions. Each pursues its own course and incidentally becomes the instrument by which the evolution of others is carried on. It must be granted, of course, that the higher the organism involved the greater is the responsibility attached to action, and apparently it is on this principle that we are expected to shrink from killing the ox, while cheerfully slaughtering the grain and the fruit; yet there cannot, it seems to me, be much validity in an argument based upon the avoidance of responsibility. Let us meanwhile remember that inaction and indecision are just as binding as action and decision, and that: "Inaction based on selfish fear can bear but evil fruit". If it is too great a responsibility to kill, not only a man, but even a pigeon, how is it that we dare assume the responsibility of parentage ?

If, however, we confine ourselves to the less complicated questions of animal life, it still is not apparent to me that in this respect there is any difference in responsibility between the man who breeds domestic animals without a view to the butcher, or "preserves" wild ones without a view to the gun, and the man who butchers the first for food or shoots the others for sport; both actions are equal in interference with the operation of natural laws. In the case of the sportsman the interference is at a minimum, for all wild animals die violent deaths, and the sportsman merely constitutes himself one of the natural agencies which are always at work.

But there are not wanting those who maintain both that the deprivation of life is in itself an evil act, and also that under no circumstances are we entitled to benefit directly or indirectly by the loss of others, to sacrifice the lower to the higher, or, as perhaps they would put it, to do evil that good may come. I have the greatest sympathy with this uncompromising attitude, though I am by no means prepared to grant the assumption involved. To me this attitude seems to be bound up with all the best and noblest aspirations of mankind. I do not blame those who keep this ideal before their eyes because they do not practise what they preach, for the simple fact is that it is impossible to live in the world as now constituted, and at the same time to carry out these beautiful and true ideas in practice.

I do not think that anyone will seriously maintain that it is possible to live in the world and to refuse to countenance under any circumstances the drawing of advantage from the killing or suffering or loss of man or beast. We are asked to consider our responsibility for the murder of pigs and the morals of the family butcher, but do we realise how far the ramifications of the principle "another's loss, our gain" extend? For it is impossible to confine the matter to the question of killing or not killing, meat or bread; the principle extends far more deeply and widely than that. It would be tedious to give instances, we can all supply them for ourselves.

Nevertheless, I admit that the altruistic principle is both beautiful and true, nay, I affirm that its realisation is the one thing - worth living for. And yet the way to this realisation is not, it seems to me, by appeals to prejudice, labelling killing "bad", vegetarianism "good", sport "cruel", vivisection "diabolical", nor yet by arguments so mixed up with emotion and vivid imagery as to blind instead of illuminating, but rather by the resolute determination to see things as they are and make the best of them, to alleviate where we cannot cure, to comprehend rather than to condemn.

I have put forward my own feelings as a very small contribution to the psychology of the subject, believing them to be in some degree representative of the ordinary kind-hearted man, who earnestly wishes to be as considerate to his younger brothers as the circumstances permit, but does not think that the interests and convenience of the grown man *ought* to be unduly sacrificed to those of the child.

I believe that I can and do love animals and my fellow men, while I am perfectly ready to acquiesce in the pain or injury either of them or myself for good cause shown, if death be an injury, then I am ready to sacrifice either my life or theirs, whichever seems required least in the scheme of things, trusting that if I do wrong I shall learn by my mistake.

The best guess that I can make at the rights and wrongs of the matter is that consistent altruism is not possible on the physical plane by its very nature, since in physical matters it is plain that the more one

has, the less there is for others, and the logical consequence would often be self-starvation. It is therefore vain and futile to aim at pure altruism here. We have to follow our own *dharma*, however beautiful and attractive the *dharma* of another, far beyond us, may appear, and part of the *dharma* of the physical plane is the preservation of the body, even at the cost of others.

In matters of desire and intellect, altruism is more and more possible and therefore worth aiming at, but it seems that it cannot be logically and completely practised until we have passed beyond the boundaries of selfhood. Meanwhile we have to turn the wheel of Life-Death, creating, preserving, and destroying, for God fulfils Himself in many ways. We are tied to the world-order, and it appears to me a true world-order, not a weltering chaos of selfishness and cruelty, even though it does involve the taking of life and of other things, and even though, by virtue of That within us, we may feel and often do feel with St. Paul that "to depart and be with Christ is far better". That time is not yet come for us, though even here and now, if we lift our eyes from the details which appear so sordid and selfish, viewed by themselves, we may vaguely sense the One.

It seems to me reasonable and natural, and therefore an aspect of the Divine, that we men must, when called upon, whether we like it or not, sacrifice our life and our all for country, principles, or in fact whatever in the great scheme transcends in importance our own individuality; it seems right that a general should sacrifice the lives of his men, sending, from his own position of perfect security, thousands to certain death, if thereby the lives of others, and among them his own more valuable life, may be preserved for his country's advantage. If they volunteer, it is well, but if they do not, he sends them just the same; in either case he loves and honours them, even as he slays them, for though they are humbler, less important, and therefore rightly sacrificed, yet are they not his brothers ?

Even so is it right and just that the happiness, the welfare, even the lives of animals should be sacrificed to man. We are not called upon to attempt the impossible task of avoiding killing, but rather to love while we kill, accepting or requiring the sacrifice of physical life (if it be a sacrifice) and giving in return that assistance on a higher plane which we are able, and should be willing, to give.

A grateful country cannot reward on the physical plane the sacrifice of her sons, and we cannot repay the animals we kill, yet we can vicariously reward the whole animal kingdom and the group-souls functioning therein, by our love and gratitude for what they give us; we can ensure, by care and thoughtfulness, that no wanton pain or unnecessary sacrifice is imposed upon them; and, more important still, we can see to it that by our own single-minded devotion the sacrifice which we accept from those below us is accepted but for the purpose of making us in our turn better implements of the Divine Will.

The attempt which is constantly made by the (physical) altruists of the Theosophical Society to utilise as argument that which, as I have said, in its ultimate fullness seems to lie beyond the intellect altogether, must inevitably lead us into a maze of casuistry.

It will be said, however, I do not doubt, that my own arguments are just as casuistical as those to which they are opposed. At any rate I am deeply conscious of the possibility of some underlying fallacy — a consideration which ought also to afflict those who differ from me, even if it is at times forgotten. My arguments, nevertheless, represent "truth" to me for the present, until I find better ones.

And to those who may think me captious I will only say that it is not comfortable to feel that one differs not only from Mrs. Besant, Mr. Leadbeater, and other "seers", but also from the main body of Theosophists.

I cannot deduce vegetarianism as a rule of life from the principles here discussed, nor do the principles themselves, as I have endeavoured to show, appear to be beyond question. Nevertheless, from behind the mist of thought and argument I seem to obtain a glimpse of truth of which the intellectual aspect, filtered through my personality, appears as follows :

Standing with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra, the enquirer learns that killing is right and necessary; that death is no evil; that action binds not, but the desire for the fruit of action. He then who takes life or accepts any sacrifice from others must, if he would be blameless, do so not for his personal advantage as an object in itself, but in order that by the sacrifice he may become better fitted to do the work, great or small, which he has to do. And, again, the amount of the sacrifice that he may accept or require from others is measured by the extent to which he in his turn is ready to sacrifice himself. Here at any rate is no sense of separateness, which is Hate, but that emphasising of the "united Self" which we are told is Love.

Let us now turn to the other set of arguments, which, as I have said, appear to me valid, to be borne out by my own limited experience, but yet to be so obscure and incomplete as to justify the application of the epithet "empirical" to the practice of vegetarianism.

In the first place it may, I think, be assumed that the object aimed at, viz., the improvement of the vehicles of man, is a reasonable one. Of course for those who make of self-improvement an object in itself — whose only desire is to enjoy the advantages of a wider consciousness, and the extended powers that accompany it — the question is whether, and how far, the game is worth the candle.

No doubt in the earlier stages of human development evolution is helped forward by enlightened selfishness, when the choice, that is to say, is between enlightened and unenlightened selfishness only.

It is also true that among intellectual people there are many to whom superphysical consciousness seems a very desirable end in itself, who are prepared to go to far greater lengths than mere abstinence from flesh and alcohol in order to attain their object, and of such, I suppose, are the Brothers of the Shadow.

For my own part I confess that the possession of astral vision, for instance, as a personal acquisition, does not seem to differ intrinsically from the possession of very acute physical sight or hearing, or say the power of physical flight.

None of these powers have fallen to my lot, and though they are all no doubt very desirable and attractive, yet I feel that I can get along quite well without them, and there are other much more important

things to think of. Even from the selfish point of view I don't see that one is likely to be the least happier for their attainment, but, as I have said, this is a matter of taste.

Far otherwise is it when that which is beyond words has once shown itself, for then the motive is neither to have nor to know, but to be; rather is there no motive in all, but a devouring, overmastering attraction, which no created thing can satisfy. There is then no question, no weighing of advantages or disadvantages, though there may be and is temporary negligence, temporary forgetfulness and temporary failure.

Such a man, seeking only to become a more perfect expression of the Divine Will, cannot but adopt vegetarianism or any other measure as his rule of life, if once he is convinced of its utility.

Yet the moving force that impels him, while quite different to the emotional or sentimental reasons which some would substitute for it, is also quite a different thing from the intellectual conviction which guides his efforts, and this "conviction" itself is for the ordinary man a very complex thing, made up of a number of elements which vary in proportion with different individuals.

Perhaps the three principal elements are personal experience, the *ipse dixit* of friends or recognised authorities, and logical scientific reasoning by which alleged facts are shown to be in harmony with general principles or with other facts already recognised as such. A fourth, less common, and for most people less trust worthy, is the inner super-rational conviction.

For many individuals the first and second, taken together, are sufficient; for all, the last is authoritative when fully felt; but for complete knowledge in the ordinary scientific sense — that is, knowledge which is not merely personal opinion — all the first three elements are essential.

The first is the cornerstone of science; the second, while it saves time, is also required to assure us that our ideas are objective as well as subjective; and the third is the keystone of the arch, without which our knowledge is merely a heterogeneous pile of provisional and isolated facts.

For my own part I fancy that my conviction of the value of vegetarianism *to me* depends a good deal on number one, a little on number two, a good deal more on number four, and scarcely at all on number three ; and in general it appears to me that while experience and authority on the subject abound, we have up to the present a most notable and lamentable deficiency of attempts to put in the keystone.

And yet it appears to me that it is only when thus coordinated that any fact or theory is fit to be published abroad outside the circle of students, or that it can be deemed to have passed into the general heritage of mankind.

I think I have said enough to show that I do not minimise the value of the higher knowledge, but it is indubitable that that knowledge cannot be communicated to others, and that by substituting for it mere emotionalism the cause of vegetarianism actually loses ground and is on the way to degenerating into a mere fad.

It is of course more than likely that the actual method by which a so-called "impure" physical body prevents the manifestation through it of forces from higher planes is, and must for the present remain, entirely beyond our comprehension, and therefore that a completed "proof" of the value of vegetarianism is impossible.

In this case, however, I think we should be frankly told so, instead of being put off with the statement that these forces cannot act through "gross" aggregations of the matter of the various sub-planes, which is no explanation at all.

But short of that, there is much to be done in the way of describing in terms of atoms, motion, relative position, in short of mechanism, what are those physical conditions which as a matter of fact do hinder such manifestation.

Here again it adds nothing to our knowledge to be told that certain chemical compounds are "pure" when derived from wheat, and "impure" when derived from flesh, and it is evident that an adequate conception of the sense in which "pure" and "impure" are used is of the first importance.

If we bear in mind that we are dealing with the physical body only, the moral or religious meanings connoted by the word "purity" must be ruled out, and the word used in a physical sense. At once, however, we encounter a confusion of ideas in the descriptions usually given.

For instance, in "*Man and His Bodies*", page 18, Mrs. Besant speaks of a "pure and noble (physical) dwelling for the self", thus attributing to the physical body qualities which are emotional and intellectual, and which therefore, as it appears to me, can only be attributed to the astral and mental bodies; and throughout not only this manual but all the literature on the subject there appears to exist a similar looseness in the use of terms such as "impure", "polluting", "refinement", "gross", "coarse", etc.

I am not now discussing the question as to whether, in addition to the physical action of "gross" food, there may or may not be some *direct* action between it and the astral body. It is hardly conceivable that the chemical combinations of the physical plane can directly affect astral matter; though, if it is true that all physical aggregates have their more or less permanent astral counterparts, such action might be imagined though hitherto not described.

In the strict physical sense, however, an "impurity" is merely an admixture of some ingredient other than the essential one, be it harmless or harmful for any particular purpose. Dirt, in fact, is matter in the wrong place, and to introduce an emotional element of disgust, etc., can only confuse the issue; for it would appear that there is nothing common or unclean, all matter as such being equally divine, "products of decomposition" being merely re-arrangements of physical atoms and molecules, and just as "clean" as anything else.

Admittedly some products of decomposition, called "carrion" as a term of opprobrium, are extremely unpleasant to the senses of most men, though I have seen Kaffirs and other fourth-race men eating it

with every appearance of enjoyment and of advantage to their health. But surely it is part of the vegetarian argument that our senses are no sufficient guide to what is really good for our bodies, any more than our emotions are.

It must be, then, that flesh and alcohol introduce into the body matter which, though as "clean" as any other matter, is either harmful to the health or else (which is the crux of the matter) has some specific, but hitherto unspecified, physical quality, which, in some hitherto unexplained way, hinders the manifestation through the body of the life of the higher planes, and which is not possessed by matter of the same chemical composition derived from vegetables without the interposition of an animal's organism or manufacturer's still.

As to health, there is no doubt that opinions differ among medical men, in whose province alone the matter lies ; yet as a layman I must say that I have failed to notice that a moderate consumption of flesh or alcohol prejudices the health of the ordinary man or unfits him for his work. ,

In any case, if it is claimed to be a fact, the reasons for it have not, as far as I know, been worked out in such a way as to convince the general body of medical men that a real law of Nature has been discovered — such, for instance, as that explaining the action of oxygen on the blood through the lungs. The "fact" is therefore as yet only "theory", and the keystone is lacking.

But how, on broad lines, are the effects of flesh and alcohol on the physical body to be generalised as influencing the Higher Life ?

The answer, to be convincing, must be in terms of pure mechanism, dealing with physical differences in the arrangement or motions of physical atoms and molecules, classifying some such arrangements as useful, others as harmful.

It is just here that all explanation fails at present. If it is permissible to take the words "gross" and "coarse" in the purely physical sense, their use would represent about the only attempt hitherto made at such a classification. It would then appear that in flesh, the atoms or molecules of matter, whether in the solid, liquid, or gaseous state, are in a different physical state of aggregation from that in which the atoms or molecules of the same substances exist when they are derived from the vegetable kingdom, or that they induce such a different condition in the materials already composing the human body.

If this is so, the difference, being physical, would be capable of being detected in the laboratory, or at any rate of being explained to the intellect of the ordinary educated man. I am not aware that any such distinction has yet been recognised, or that, for instance, albumen derived from flesh can be distinguished from any other albumen, or even from that which has been recently produced by chemists from "inorganic" ingredients; and the same applies with still more force to the simpler chemical compounds, such as fats, sugars, acids, mineral salts, and water itself.

In short, it appears broadly as though hydrogen were always the same hydrogen, carbonic acid always

the same carbonic acid, and so on, however they are generated, and whencesoever they are derived. Colour is given to this, the common idea, also by Mrs. Besant's well-known article on "Occult Chemistry", where, on the four higher physical sub-planes, the ultimate atoms are shown to combine in fixed numbers and definite arrangements to produce those simpler forms which, on the gaseous sub-plane, combine to form the various gases known to chemists.

The subject of "products of decomposition", regarded as a definitely harmful class of constituents of the body, has already been referred to, and it has been pointed out that decomposition is merely the name for a re-arrangement of atoms or molecules, generally in simpler forms, and often involving an addition of oxygen. But, if this is so, almost anything may be regarded as a "product of decomposition".

To take the particular case of alcohol, again eliminating all moral or religious questions, and confining ourselves to its physical constitution; alcohol is the name given to a whole class of chemical compounds of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen; and ordinary, or ethyl, alcohol is a member of this class, intermediate in properties between methyl and butyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol in practice is usually derived from the "decomposition" of sugar, which again is derived from starch. It represents, in fact, a stage in the oxidation of sugar, and a continuance of the process, with further oxidation, converts it into acid (vinegar for instance). Where then does the "impurity" lurk? It is presumably not in the original starch of sugar, nor in the oxygen; and if it were the *process* that is "impure", then vinegar might be expected to be still worse.

Again, although ethyl, or ordinary alcohol, is usually prepared in the manner just indicated, yet the alcohols generally can, in the laboratory, be prepared by quite other methods. Are they equally harmful when thus prepared ?

If the word coarse, or gross, in its strictly physical sense, be a more correct way of characterising the peculiar objectionable quality, then we have to understand that the molecules, or the atoms composing the molecules, of alcohol are more closely or more loosely packed together than are those of sugar or vinegar, and that this does all the damage.

I have intentionally discussed the subject from the point of view of chemistry and physics, and not from that of physiology, because I have practically no knowledge of the latter science. It is possible that the latter aspect may be most important, but, at any rate, there must be a chemical and physical side as well, and what I chiefly aim at in any case is to get this matter of "gross", "coarse", "impure", etc., cleared up, because, after all, it is the kind of term almost exclusively used by those who have tried to give a scientific explanation of the effect of flesh and alcohol upon the Higher Life.

One solution of the difficulty as regards flesh has indeed suggested itself to me, only, however, to be abandoned. It occurred to me that the difference between, say, carbon derived from an animal and carbon from a vegetable might be due to differences in the state of development of the ultimate physical atoms of which the chemical element carbon is composed. That is to say, that in the case of vegetable carbon these atoms might have developed an extra set of spirillae as compared with those composing animal carbon.

On the other hand, as the animal kingdom is higher in the scale than the vegetable, the class of atoms composing animal bodies might be expected to be the more highly evolved of the two. As, however, again I see *this* argument opening up a vista of cannibalism, there seems to be something shaky about it too!

On the whole, I confess with sorrow that all the "explanations" hitherto given explain nothing to me, but rather obscure the subject with a mist of words; and again, ever lurking in the background of my mind, are the words of the Christ:

There is nothing from without a man that entering into him can defile him, but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

There is, however, one very important way in which it would appear that vegetarianism can affect the astral body or mental body directly, but, then, presumably the same effect might be produced in many cases, my own included, by a precisely opposite course. I refer to the disciplinary result of going without what one likes. This seems to be a real and easily understood advantage for all who aim at the Higher Life. In my case, however, even this satisfaction is denied me, for I detest, and always have detested, meat and alcohol, or rather, having always done so as a child and young man, I am now, after a short struggle with the acquired conventional habits of society, returning to my distaste for them with a constantly decreasing amount of effort, so that by this time it would be a real penance to eat a beefsteak or drink a glass of champagne.

This, however, is travelling beyond the physical plane altogether, and touching upon the great question of asceticism, which is much more far-reaching than mere vegetarianism, though little emphasis is laid upon it in the arguments of vegetarians.

Now, as regards experimental vegetarianism there is, of course, a very large body of testimony as to the advantages *believed* to have been derived from it. And in my own limited experience the practical effects of abstinence from flesh and alcohol seem to corroborate the teachings received. It is perfectly true that since, some few years ago, I began these practices, I have found my health improving, my brain growing clearer, my thoughts and passions more under control, my hold upon the things, good and bad, of this world somewhat looser and more independent. Occasional glimpses of what seem to be higher planes have also not been wanting — overtones, as it were, of the common things of this life, some beautiful beyond words, some painful and depressing.

This, however, is entirely vitiated as a criterion of the value of abstinence by the fact that at the same time as I adopted the latter as a rule of life I also began a very much stricter supervision over my thoughts, passions and physical activities than ever before, driven forward by the intellectual light that followed my first recognition of Theosophy in this life, and by the immense accentuation of the impulse toward the Higher Life which must follow upon an increased intellectual grasp of ways and means.

Now, whatever the influence of the body upon the mind may be, the influence of the mind upon the

emotions and the physical body is quite undoubted. Accordingly I am quite unable to say how much, if any, of the result is due to vegetarianism, and how much to direct efforts upon higher planes. To obtain a test of any value, abstinence should be coupled with an absence of special effort towards the Higher Life, and the only place that occurs to me where these conditions are fulfilled is in our prisons ! At any rate it is clear that my private experience does not in itself warrant me in advocating vegetarianism as a principle.

As to the value of Authority in general, I have once or twice already been permitted by the kindness of the Editors to express my opinion in this REVIEW, so I will not go over the ground again. If my reason told me that vegetarianism was wrong, no authority would weigh against it. As it is, my reason merely says "not proven", and in such a case it appears a small thing to follow the directions of those who say they know; it can do no harm and may do good, and is not difficult anyhow.

I must, however, frankly confess that at bottom I am a vegetarian because I am made that way, and cannot do otherwise. I have a deep and entirely irrational conviction, binding for me, but worthless for anyone else, that abstinence *is* right, if one only knew why, and an equally irrational purpose to follow it whither it may lead.