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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## The Food Question (1953)

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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In times of national emergency by reason of threatening or actual war, one of the most vital considerations, and one that very largely governs the issue, is that of the food supply. To conserve it is a primary feature of both defence and aggression. To keep it from falling into the enemy's hands is a tactic of victory. If this is true in the natural and earthly realm, it certainly is true in the spiritual and heavenly. It is not always realised by Christians that they are born (at new birth) into conditions which are such as mark an emergency. That is to say, a state of war has existed from the day that Adam sinned, and that warfare is becoming more intense as the end of the dispensation approaches. A feature of this warfare is the food question, and the final issue in the case of each believer depends upon spiritual food to a very serious degree. As in the time of Gideon, so now. The Midianites then sought to spoil and steal all the crops. Gideon was marked by God as one to be taken up and used as a deliverer because secretly he gave himself up to conserve food for his brethren, and so defeat the enemy.

But to consider the matter of food generally, there are some quite simple analogies between the natural and the spiritual.

Firstly, then, is the matter of

### **Appetite**

A first question asked of a patient by a doctor is, How is your appetite? showing that this is closely related to sickness or health, and may be a symptom. Now a fact to be recognised is that in the Christian there is an "inner man", which is altogether other and distinct from the outer man, and has

a whole set of definite faculties and functions. This inner man is capable of growth; of being in sickness or in health; of being weak or strong; of being able to do spiritual exploits, or being impotent in the fight. No matter how full of natural vim and energy a Christian may be, he cannot by any natural strength effect even one iota of spiritual value. There will, sooner or later, be a terrible breakdown both in the worker and the work, and any emergency will quickly precipitate this, if there is no real spiritual constitution. This depends upon spiritual food. But inasmuch as it is so easy to go on in natural energy and activity and fail to realise that it is not really spiritual power, we should apply the test of spiritual life and health. How is your appetite? What kind of an appetite have you for spiritual food? Is it poor? Is it easily satisfied? Is it faddy and fussy? Do you have to have your spiritual food prepared and served up in such a pleasant and tasty way as to make you feel that you are eating and yet not eating? What can you eat? is a question for the delicate and invalid.

For the truly healthy and sound, the demand is for "something that you can put your teeth into"; "something solid"; "something to live and work on"! This is a fairly sound test of our spiritual life, and Paul, the Apostle, has left us in no doubt about it. "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but... as unto babes. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for... ye were not able to bear it" (1 Cor. 3:1,2).

### **A Self-deceiving Practice**

One of the most treacherous and disastrous features of the feeding side of life in recent years is the confectionery side. Pleasant to the taste, nullifying the sense of hunger *for the moment*, quick to be taken, the sense of need or desire for anything more substantial is destroyed. But it is a false world, treacherous in that it fails to make for constitution, and when the rigid test comes; when epidemics are rife, and germs are abroad; when for any reason endurance is called for or a crisis has to be passed, then the fatal lack of constitution is revealed.

This all has a tragic counterpart or parallel in the spiritual life. There is a distressing tendency to serve up spiritual things in the way that will make the least demand. Attractiveness is a primary consideration. The solid classics of a generation or two ago have been supplanted by that which can be read in a few minutes, and then is done with. It is said that this is what is demanded, and there is little demand for anything more substantial. Is this a symptom of the spiritual state of the majority of Christians today? We cannot but foresee a terrible "fainting in the day of adversity".

The perils of this condition are many and great. One of them is a predisposition to error. Errors usually gain their advantage by presenting something which offers the line of least resistance. That is to say, they seem easily to solve some difficult problem, or offer a quick way to a desired end. There is something pleasant and fascinating about every substitute which Satan produces for the pure truth. People who are not prepared to take or accept the way of the Cross in all its implications are carried away as by a flood when some beautiful lie is offered as a way to reach the same end. The Word of God makes it unmistakably clear that the Cross demands or postulates the setting aside of the whole race in Adam, and of man by nature; and that there is no hope for any, only as they are of the new creation in Christ Jesus. Universalism — the pretty lie — will destroy the real meaning of the Cross by saying that the Cross is such a great thing that it could never allow of a single unit being lost eternally. We only cite this as indicative of how a superficial state of spiritual life resultant from poor feeding lays people open to be swept away by beautiful errors.

### **Discrimination and Seriousness of Purpose**

A predisposition in the physical realm to any malady is often overcome by constitutional means. So it is in the spiritual.

In the physical body there is a wonderful system of testing (accepting or rejecting) food properties. The blood-stream performs the double function of bringing nourishment to each and every part of the body, and taking from it its waste products for elimination. Everything that is taken into the body is carried to the little doors, so to speak, or cells, and there it is challenged by the action of certain secretions. Such of the food as is found to have nutritive qualities is accepted, broken down, and transmuted into vital tissue and nerve fuel. If there are useless or poisonous elements, they are — in a healthy body — rejected. A battle may ensue for their ejection, and some consciousness of this battle may be registered in the person concerned. The point for the moment is, that in the matter of food there is required a basic vitality by which values are discerned, determined, and turned into the thought, the speech, the action, and the nature of the individual. On the other hand, the harmful elements, and that which is lacking in value, will be perceived and rejected. Thus in the case of the believer, how important it is that for building up there should be a real vitality in relation to food.

So then, real life means appetite and discrimination, leading to strength and capability. But it is also necessary to take an initial serious attitude toward the food question. We can through carelessness fail to give the inner man what he needs, and just allow him to be served up with mere pleasantries in spiritual truth. Let us recognise that he *must have* wholesome and really nutritious food, and we should give ourselves definitely to seeking this out. The essence of nourishment is Christ Himself. Therefore the test of everything is whether it really ministers Christ to us. Not, How much more do we know? or, Have a pleasant sensation, but, How is it possible to grow in the measure of Christ?