

by Hope Sawyer Büyükmiçci



I'VE BEEN THINKING about vegetarianism, a way of life which is growing more popular now that people have become aware of the dangers of meat-eating. The Animal Rights Movement has caused people to take a fresh look at the way human beings treat animals.

Many years ago in Russia, the great Tolstoy had invited to dinner a non-vegetarian lady, who asked that meat be served. As Tolstoy escorted her to the dinner table, she discovered a live chicken tied to her chair. "What does this mean?" she asked.

"My conscience forbids me to kill it," said Tolstoy. "As you are the only guest taking meat, I would be greatly obliged if you would kill it yourself."

The lady preferred a vegetarian meal.

Perhaps the distance, for most of us, from our dining tables to the slaughter-house, lulls our minds. We are able to take the dismembered bodies of fellow animals daintily into our mouths without thinking what we do. We forget the horrid traffic in lives, and the terrors of the abattoir, for which we are responsible.

I ate meat for years, even though I loved animals. Then a hunter woke me up. I had asked him how he could kill the beautiful wild animals, and he smiled and said, "You eat meat, don't you? Well, a deer is just a cow. A quail's a chicken. What's the difference?"

There is a difference, of course. Meat animals are not killed for sport, and it is possible to kill

NEW GOALS

them quickly, whereas thousands of wild ones escape to die in agony or live as cripples. But his words hit home. I gave up meat-eating. It was not hard to do, for mere taste of food is not our deepest concern. If it were, what would prevent us from cannibalism, since human flesh tastes good—so cannibals say.

To be a human is to be unsatisfied. When we reach one goal we set another. Pioneers have progressed beyond vegetarianism in their quest for harmless living. These pioneers call themselves Vegans. They live entirely on fruits, grains and vegetables, allowing no animal products in their diet or clothing.

After our family had been vegetarians for a few months, we were invited to dinner by local Vegans. What kind of meal would it be without butter, milk or eggs? It turned out to be surprisingly delicious and satisfying. We became Vegans, and found plenty to eat.

Gordon Gaskill recounts hearing an old Englishman in Africa describe barbaric customs he had met with. "Can you imagine," he said, "people so primitive that they love to eat the embryos of certain birds, and slices from the belly of certain animals? And grind up grass seed, make it into a paste, burn it over a fire, then smear it with a greasy mess they extract from the mammary fluid of animals?" That's enough to

make anyone shudder, until he realizes the description is of eggs, bacon, and buttered toast.

Madame Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, was once interviewed by a reporter who asked her rather scornfully if she was doing anything about the sacred cows who roam India safe from predation by man. "Yes," she said. "We are building homes for them."

Most Americans see a cow as milk, butter and meat. But do we ever think how our pet dogs look to people who value dogs only as food? Or how roast beef looks to those who revere cows?

I'm thankful to the hunter who caused me to think. I've been a vegetarian, then a Vegan, for more than 20 years, and have never been sorry. I regret only that I didn't start earlier to consider the rights of the animals, and to refrain from eating the ones I love. ■■

NOTE: *Have you been doing some thinking lately? If it is about animals, what you've seen that disturbs or delights you, write a letter to this column. Here's a chance to express your deepest feelings, your most profound thoughts. If you are 12-18 years of age, we would like to hear what you think about animals. We may publish what you say (unless you specifically request that we do not). Sorry, but we cannot answer each letter personally.*

Address: OUR FELLOW ANIMALS, AV Magazine, Suite 204 Noble Plaza, 801 Old York Road, Jenkintown, PA 19046.