

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Bad Eating

When people say of someone *He lives well*, they almost always mean *He eats well*. We've had a great variety of notions about eating well, and never more than in the last century. Cave-men appear to have lived from (red) hand to mouth, dividing life between fierce hunting and desperate flight, depending which way they were looking (up or down the food-chain). I guess *eating well* for him was a momentary sense of safety and repletion. If you take a wide-angled look at King Edward VII, you will see someone who tackled 5-course breakfasts, 10-course lunches, and 15-course dinners most days. He had a pair of scales in the porch at Sandringham, and guests had to submit to being weighed on arrival and departure. If they hadn't gained weight at the royal table, they weren't asked again.

Elephant Sufficiency

We would consider such a regimen vulgar and disgusting, having visited the school of one-lettuce-leaf-thrice-daily, and having replaced the concept of hell-fire with that of cholesterol. But I hope most people will enjoy a feast at just intervals, and will try to master the modest arts which make it possible. I'm appalled by the success of the packaged food industry, and by the sad woman in the supermarket who assured me that 250 grams of mashed potato in a foil dish was well worth £1.25 because it was so delicious. *Why waste your money on what is not bread?* Isaiah's question is, of course, about far more than diet. Let your mind expand its meaning. Recognise the rivers of falsity that flow in and out of your senses in this suffering culture. Meretricious politics, fake emotion, empty dignities, deceptive goals, exploitative offers of meaning and security, all in a context of hidden injustice. We are offered fatuous "art", mawkish "poetry", and morality that would have disgraced a determined sinner of the past; our beliefs are centred around the gratification of our furthest throw of selfishness, and our "great heroes" are thugs in shorts, being paid princely salaries for playing ball-games. At least the Romans knew their gladiators for what they were.

Monsters

Good life needs a sound genesis, sustained by proper nourishment on a regular basis. It is easy to become obsessed with one element or another of our good things. If we are deprived of leisure, fun,

and the sense of play we grow long-faced and dull. If we play and play all day we get trivial and lacking in direction. Balance is everything. Yet as a people we keep our attention for extremists: a person who lives a balanced life, with time for many good things, capable of calm reflection and vigorous work, endurance and tenderness, laughter, tears, and equable temper, is of no interest to us. If he spends six months buried in a coffin under his cellar, or plays sport till he gives himself premature arthritis or drinks himself into cirrhosis (neither of which he is capable of spelling) or has seven broken marriages, we want to know all about him.

Properly Fed

One thing we know about Jesus is that he fed people, both intimately (*he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it*) and on the grand scale (*they all ate as much as they wanted, five thousand of them*), and he told us: *I am the true bread, come down from heaven, so that you may eat and never die*. Reborn in baptism, we have within us the seed of God; fed by the true bread, we keep within us the pledge of eternity. These are sacramental *realities*, and not mere symbols. They are what they signify. It is God who is feeding us with all the necessities of life. Even Sainsbury's dolled-up wisp of pork with apple sauce in a fancy packet is, distantly, God's gift. The heart of all these gifts is in the holy things we share in our faith. Setting these gifts at our heart, let us eat, and live, well.

Fr Philip