From Flesh-Eating to Fruit-Eating

by E. Frances William

Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 3

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

[Page 12] VEGETARIANISM has been much discussed on its scientific interest, and also on its advantages in health and economy. Comparative analyses of food abound, so do persuasive lists of comparative prices, as well as marvellous histories of longevity; what is not so abundant is simple and practical instruction for those who wish to adopt the diet.

This can scarcely be because the course is plain and easy, for it is, on the contrary, beset with difficulties on every side. Yet this question of diet is not without its importance at the present time. Vegetarianism claims to be the basis of long life and economy, of contentment and temperance, and of the cure of disease; such a claim, if made good, should solve most of the bewildering problems of social life. The motives on which a trial would be made of any such panacea would certainly be of various kinds, and methods of making the experiment would be as various as motives, for both would be the outcome of individual idiosyncrasies. But before considering the success or failure of any particular method in any individual case it will be well to go over common ground, considering how far rules can be found to fit all alike, and how far exceptions will have to be made.

There is no doubt that numbers of people attempting a change of diet from the best possible motives, ignominiously fail. It may be that some natures lack endurance for the battle against prejudice and ridicule that the vegetarian has to face in the beginning. This sort of persecution shows itself in so many different forms and in such insidious ways that the mere nervous strain of the strife is enough to dishearten a timid nature. Or it may be that the change is made very suddenly, health is upset by its suddenness, and this is taken for proof that vegetarian diet is unfitting or unwholesome. Again, it may be that the novice does not study the science of the question and so never discovers the nourishing food lying close at hand.

In so momentous a change as that from flesh-eating to fruit-eating the first secret of success is to go slowly, as Nature does. Nature never develops anything hastily — except perhaps ill-weeds — she is joyous, but never eager; active, but never hurried; determined, but never rash. There is about her processes something of the peaceful calm of the higher consciousness, as well as the weight of the enduring will; and so it should **[Page 13]** be with those who are avowedly forsaking the lower for the higher — the cruel for the kind — the civilised for the natural.

Next in importance comes diligence, especially in learning the science of the question, and for this an impartial and unprejudiced mind is needed; a mind that will consider all things with equal favour — as the sun shines alike on all, whether good or bad — knowing that civilisation is not infallible in its labelling even in the rough distinctions of good and bad.

In the controversy between flesh-eaters and vegetarians there are certain points on which the two sides agree. They agree that animal differs from vegetable food not so much in its chemical constituents as in being altogether of a different class. All animal food is second-hand; it has already been eaten and digested — this is so even with eggs and milk, but actual flesh is a stage further on towards decomposition. They agree also that in both can be found the same chemical constituents, though the large proportion of what figures in tables of chemical analysis as "Ash" in foods from the vegetable kingdom would seem to point to valuable additions. There are plenty of chemical analyses in print to prove these points.

There remain two points on which the two sides of the controversy do not agree. The first is that of stimulant. It is proved by practical experiment that a concentrated essence of beef, that is to say the concentrated extractives or stimulating element of beef is a more rapid restorative than wine or even spirits. There are drugs still more powerful even than beef, and probably less harmful, so that beef, need not be produced on purpose for those suffering from fainting or weakness; but investigation would certainly be needed on this point if animal food were altogether abolished.

The second point of disagreement concerns the assimilation of food, one side contending that animal food is more easily assimilated than vegetable food, and drawing arguments in support of this view from the fact that those who have been meat-eaters all their lives become sooner or later unable to digest anything else; the other side showing that those who become vegetarians continue even to old age able to digest such things as nuts and cucumber, which to the meat-eater are almost poisonous; and arguing from this that the digestive organs being freed from the enormous labour of digesting meat are able to digest the most indigestible of fruits. The argument against the vegetarian would probably break down however if any line of distinction could be drawn between the two causes — the merely stimulating and the easily assimilated. Preparations from meat are found to produce an immediate effect in restoring strength, and from this fact the conclusion is hastily drawn that they are easily assimilated; whereas the result would be precisely the same if they were (as contended by the other side) merely a very strong stimulant.**[Page 14]**

In the mixed diet of a flesh-eater there is a rough classification of food into solids with the accompanying vegetables and sauces; fruits and sweets regarded as unwholesome; bread and butter considered as of little value; and drink. It is important that the vegetarian novice also should classify his food. To do this he must begin at the beginning and learn his dietary tables all over again, like an Englishman does about money and weights when he goes into a country where the decimal system prevails. He must banish from his mind all that he has learnt from his childhood upwards about meat being so strengthening, and making his mind a blank imprint upon it either in figures or proportionate spaces what he learns from chemistry about foods of different kinds compared with meat. He will principally need to study two points; first, the chemical constituents required to support life in man; and secondly, how to supply them from the vegetable kingdom, as if meat did not exist. When this is well fixed in his mind let him try to supply them from the animal kingdom, and he will be astonished to find how difficult and complicated a process right feeding is when flesh is admitted as food. Beyond this he will discover, sooner or later, that change of diet once begun will not end in a mere transition from the animal to the vegetable kingdom, but will go on to a more radical change in the chemical constituents required. First of all, however, there must be merely the transition from one kingdom to another, and even this slowly and carefully.

The first practical question then is to examine the diet of a meat-eater, to discover its chemical

constituents, and to supply these from the vegetable world. This is step the first.

Shall we roughly classify the flesh-eaters solids, or meat and flesh of all kinds, as nitrogenous or flesh-forming food ? Meat as usually eaten without fat contains little else than nitrogenous elements in addition to its enormous proportion of water. Then the meat-eater's carbonaceous or heat-forming food would be such things as sweets, cakes, and puddings, and there would then remain only that mysterious element called stimulant or extractives about which so little seems to be known, and which is supposed to reside chiefly in meat, wine, and spirits. This last element is a necessity to most meat-eaters, but its necessity disappears with the disappearance of meat. This is proved by universal experience — a vegetarian drunkard is unknown. It is curious to observe how even in the case of meat-eaters nature will assert herself and insist upon due proportions. How few of those who eat eagerly of meat ever like milk or brown bread. Fewer still can digest nuts or beans. The reason of this will be seen from what follows.

The evidence of analysis goes to prove that a human being requires about 15 oz. to 20 oz. of food daily (reckoned as dry food, not counting water) **[Page 15]** and that of this about 1/6 should be of a nitrogenous or flesh-forming character, the rest being carbonaceous or heat-forming chiefly. Dr. Allinson confirms this by some very interesting personal experience of living on 1½ lbs. of wheat-meal a day, this containing about 3 oz. of nitrogen (or flesh-forming food) and about 17 oz. of carbon (or heat-forming food). There are, however, well authenticated cases where even so little as 12 oz. was the entire weight of food consumed including water. A meat-eater in order to get 3 oz. of nitrogen would have to consume nearly 1½ lbs. of meat daily, and he would then lack nearly 14 ozs. of his 17 ozs. of carbon. This he would probably supply by means of potatoes (each pound of which contains about 3 ozs. of carbon) or pastry made of fine flour and fat. But in doing this he would consume a volume of water three times the weight of the nourishing elements, and quite as much as the 1½ lbs. of wheat-meal would require (in addition to the water naturally contained in it) to make it into bread or porridge.

The vegetarian on the other hand not only finds his food arranged ready for him in right proportions in grains, and therefore in whole-meal bread and porridge, so that he could live and grow on these alone, requiring nothing else, in a most admirable simplicity; but he can also take a mixture of beans and roots, or of nuts and fruit, with the same result, and with the addition of valuable salts and acids not found in flesh.

A little reflection will show how great a change this would be, and how very well calculated it would be to upset the digestive organs were it carried out too suddenly. Let the novice begin then by changing his diet at one meal in the day only. Which this should be depends very largely on circumstances too varied for general discussion, but in the large majority of cases it would be breakfast, if only because in the case of breakfast there would not be any question of drink — the vegetarian can choose amongst tea, coffee, and cocoa just like a meat-eater. He would, however, do well to choose coffee, if it is served without any admixture of chicory. We are thus only concerned with actual eatables.

The novice should not begin with a breakfast of bread and butter merely, if he is used to more variety. But he must emphatically replace ordinary baker's bread with good brown bread, and he should also take his drink, whether tea, coffee, or cocoa, half milk if possible. To this foundation he should add some little dainty dish, as mushrooms on toast, rissoles made of beans and potatoes, porridge, or muffins or cakes; otherwise his stomach being unaccustomed to monotony will refuse to take a sufficient quantity, and there must be no diminishing of quantity at first. To this there should be added fruit; cooked fruit in

preference to raw as a beginning. More than this vegetarian breakfast should not be attempted for some time, nor should the next step be taken until all craving for meat at **[Page 16]** breakfast has disappeared and the vegetarian breakfast become a standing habit. This will generally take about three or four months.

Most people who are not huge feeders — and Lancelot Gobbo does not often turn vegetarian — most people take one large meal a day and two smaller ones, without counting afternoon tea: breakfast, dinner, afternoon tea, and supper; or breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner. Breakfast has been suggested as the first meal for experiment; the next meal for experiment should be the other smaller meal, lunch or supper. The best way to deal with it is to make it another meal very much like the breakfast just described, a meal in which brown bread and butter and milk are the solids, and fruits, pudding, porridge, salad, or other vegetables the accessories, "maigre" soup being a useful addition. Supposing this to be impossible, as in cases where there would be a very substantial lunch and a slighter meal for late dinner, it is not difficult to keep lunch as the heavy meal still devoted to flesh food, and at late dinner to make a selection that leaves out meat. Maigre soup, vegetables, and such sweets as are not made with dripping or suet. If this is not sufficient, the cheese course can be made to fill a large gap, and the dessert that follows is the vegetarian's paradise. Let the novice devour as fast as he can the fruit that is forbidden to the degraded stomachs of flesh-eaters.

Then whatever may be the time of the year at which the first start is made, nothing more must be attempted until green peas are in season. The novice must continue his one meal a day of meat until June, and he may then safely leave off meat altogether and supply its place with green peas and new potatoes, taking plenty of butter with both. Duly he should eat four times the quantity he would have eaten with his meat, that is about half a vegetable dish full of peas and about six good sized potatoes, and a piece of butter about the size of an egg. Even so the novice will probably be obliged to return to meat once a day when winter sets in, but with the following summer he will find himself a full blown vegetarian ready to take his vows after a novitiate of about two years altogether.

The vegetarian at this point will have discovered that as no one can live on flesh alone, so there are vegetable foods which alone would not support life. But he will also have proved what has been asserted above, that there are other vegetable foods which not only support life alone, but which also contain all that man needs for nourishment in proportion proper for his needs; some for health and some for sickness.

First and foremost amongst those proportioned for health is bread — to the Englishman at least the staff of life, and the fundamental food of adult man. The vegetarian in every stage of his career, whether as a novice or as a practised hand, should never forget that in England at least bread is the one thing needful. He should agitate perpetually for pure **[Page 17]** bread; bread made from whole-meal, but without husk of any kind; bread made without yeast or salt or alum or potatoes or any other adulteration; bread that is neither sour nor white; but sweet and brown, and soft and fresh, and fit for the food of the lords of creation.

Another food of the same kind is milk — not a vegetable food, but one that can be used without taking life, often very usefully during the transition stage. Eggs are of the same kind, but are for many reasons les admissible in vegetarian diet.

The largest class of all is food in which one element is found predominating over others. These should be roughly divided into two heads; the nitrogenous or flesh-forming class, consisting of peas, beans, and nuts of all kinds; and the carbonaceous or heat-forming class, consisting of the lighter grains, such as rice, sago, and the like, as also the interior portions of heavier grains, such as white flour and oswega.

Besides these there is the watery class such as turnips and potatoes, which contain little else than water; and the fruit class, about which less is known.

Vegetarianism would regard these classes as follows: —

The nitrogenous is strong meat.

The carbonaceous is vegetable and pudding.

The watery is for purposes of flavouring.

The fruit is wine and beef-tea.

It is perhaps unnecessary to act cookery book further than to say that all peas, beans, and lentils, most heavy grains, and nearly all nuts, should be thought of as meat, cooked as meat, and eaten as meat; as should also milk and cheese; that the lighter grains are best as soup or jelly; fruit at the end of a meal as wine; and roots only for flavouring or thickening.

There is, however, another aspect of food — its magnetism. Very little is really known about magnetism of any kind, and that of food has perhaps been less studied than any other, yet most people are well able to perceive not only the imparted, but also the inherent magnetism of food. Is there anyone who cannot tell whether their food has been prepared with kindness and care or the reverse ? And who would ever mistake an earth-fed from a sun-fed food ? About imparted magnetism it is useless to say much, for few persons can choose the hands through which their food should pass, but it is the more desirable that food should come as directly as possible from the place where it grows to the mouth it is to fill. Every hand it passes through has power to poison it: every process it undergoes deprives it more and more, not only of its genuineness, but also of that intangible something which is the more likely to be its essential goodness, because it eludes our perceptions.

But even this subtle essence can be of different sorts; it can be **[Page 18]** rough and homely — of the earth, earthy; or it can be the ethereal, produced not by mere growth, but by the unfolding of leaves, the budding of flowers, and the ripening of fruit — processes not of the damp, dark soil but of the warm bright sun.

Thus the novice, finding himself at the end of about two years to have surmounted the difficulties of a change of diet, will see above him still further heights to scale. It is true that he no longer destroys life to find food like a savage tiger, nor does he bolt flesh like a dog, nor purr over it like a cat; but he still perhaps drinks milk like a calf, eats cheese as greedily as a mouse, and drowns himself in cream like a fly.

Soon however a change comes, and all animal food becomes distasteful; eggs first, then cheese, butter, milk, and even cream, disappear from his dietary, and along with this a more sparing use of nitrogenous foods begins, while an inexplicable craving for fruit, hitherto unknown or unrecognised, begins to assert itself irresistibly. The whole quantity too, of food required diminishes, appetite is satisfied and strength maintained, and even increased, on much smaller rations; stimulants and condiments are no longer needed; and thirst is unknown.

In this more advanced stage the vegetarian is fast becoming a fruit-eater, and besides bread, eats little else than fruit. But as he is no longer a beginner it is no longer useful to follow him into the chronic stage of the old hand who lives joyfully on bread and fruit, never wishes for alcohol, only bargains that he may not be obliged to feed in the same room with meat-eaters, and that he may be spared the disgusting odour of burning flesh. Here then are the watch-words: endure, go slowly, learn, and aspire. The rocks on which success may be wrecked are : persecution, hurry, ignorance, and heedlessness. But in the end the vegetarian will find that he has not only accomplished a most important change in his diet, but that he has also added independence and discretion to his stock of virtues.

The question of mere diet is in this way disposed of; not so the whole difficulty of the change from flesh-eating to fruit-eating. There still remains for discussion one of the greatest trials of the whole course, that of persecution. There are those whose endeavours are stunted, if not eventually destroyed, by the solicitude of friends and the opinions of doctors. It needs no little courage to face the jeers of brothers, but much more to resist maternal entreaties. The novice who is really in earnest will be ready to turn over in his mind the question of leaving home altogether, but so serious a complication as this does not arise until meat is entirely abandoned. So long as the novice can manage to swallow a square inch of flesh, the attention of friends is not drawn to his plate, but even the square inch at last becomes impossible, and the novice must then make plans to secure **[Page 19]** freedom. Nevertheless, the exercise of patient diplomacy and quiet but persistent will is in itself a step on the upward path — a path so thorny that we can scarcely begin too early to accustom our feet to the pricks, with the deliberate intention of developing the higher nature at the cost of the lower.

Amongst the many who change carnivorous for vegetarian diet, these aspirants to the path above all others claim the sympathy of Theosophists; yet these are the very people who so often go astray in changing their food. It may be that they are too eager in asceticism; too inattentive to their own wants; too keenly bent on higher things; but in one way or another if they do not suffer in health, it is a sort of miracle, due, probably, to an unusually healthy mental or spiritual condition. It is for vegetarians of this class that this paper is more especially written.

These are not, however, the only persons who change their diet. There are those who do it from motives of economy or as an interesting experiment. Such seldom encounter persecution. A gentle shower of pity is usually their reward. But there are others who have as great a claim to sympathy as the aspirants: those who well-nigh despairing in search of health-grasp eagerly at any system carrying the banner of hope. And these are of all others the most difficult to guide. In some cases a vegetarian doctor is a great help; in others a sudden change of diet will produce so marvellous a change for the better in health, that all but a prejudiced minority will be won over and the sufferer will have a party of support; in others again, a simple and truthful following of nature's cravings for fruit and brown bread for instance, even at the risk

of being accused of invalid caprices, will disarm persecution. But the invalid too must aspire to the higher life, or effort will be defeated by indiscretion. If the mind be fixed rather upon the right than upon the desired, the fixed mind will in the end shape the surroundings. It is, however, well that vegetarians should know something about sick diet, otherwise they may easily be impeded in their progress by such unworthy opponents as headache, sore-throat, or biliousness. It is good in the first place to know a few grandmother's remedies, such as a juice of an onion to squeeze into a wasp sting; a raw potato to scrape over a scald, or to rub on an aching head; coffee for sickness; hot water to drink for indigestion; and lemon juice in boiling water for a shivering cold. It will be found, too, that carbonaceous foods — or rather drinks — are most useful with a raised temperature; and fruits and nitrogenous food for a low state of the system. Again, in all cases of inherited or organic disease large quantities of fruit should be taken habitually, and in some cases there are spices which will prove beneficial, the need for them being generally indicated by a natural craving for them. Whether in health or in sickness, nature itself is the only safe guide, but by far the **[Page 20]** larger proportion of mankind is unable to understand her. For these let the rule be to go slowly step by step; to learn carefully with a free and open mind; to bear patiently with a peaceful soul; and to cure likes by likes.

For these — the favoured few — who have the light to perceive natural instincts truly, and the courage to follow them honestly, no rule is needed; and with such even important changes may take place in a short time without danger. Still it is a rare gift either to see what is true, or to act without fear, and therefore rules for following nature are not altogether out of place for those who are striving to give up flesh-eating for fruit-eating.

ON ABSTINENCE FROM ANIMAL FOOD

by **PORPHYRY**

translated by Thomas Taylor

The nutriment of the rational soul is that which preserves it in a rational state. But this is intellect; so that it is to be nourished by intellect; and we should earnestly endeavour that it may be fattened through this, rather than the flesh may become pinguid through esculent substances. For intellect preserves for us eternal life, but the body when fattened causes the soul to be famished, through its hunger after a blessed life not being satisfied, increases our mortal part, since it is of itself insane, and impedes our attainment of an immortal condition of being. It likewise denies by corporifying the soul, and drawing her down to that which is foreign to her nature. And the magnet, indeed, imparts, as it were, a soul to the iron which is placed near it; and the iron, though most heavy, is elevated, and runs to the spirit of the stone. Should he, therefore, who is suspended from incorporeal and intellectual deity, be anxiously busied in procuring food, which fattens the body, that is an impediment to intellectual perception ? Ought he not rather, by contracting what is necessary to the flesh into that which is little and easily procured, be *himself* nourished, by adhering to God more closely than the iron to the magnet ? * * * * O that, as Homer says, we were not in want either of meat or drink, that we might be truly immortal! — the poet in thus speaking beautifully signifying, that food is the auxiliary not only of life, but also of death. * * * * Democrates says, that to live badly, and not prudently, temperately and piously, is not to live in reality, but to die for a long time.