

## 12. Pure Food

Vegetarian Societies seeking to promote vegetarianism often give economic reasons for doing so. The Vegetarian Society of the United Kingdom made much mileage from the cheapness of the vegetarian diet during the Victorian period and long afterwards. This claim was never possible in Australia as meat was nearly always both cheap and abundant and meat alternatives were often difficult to come by and expensive. Consequently, many early vegetarians grew as much food as they could on their own plots of land so that their diet mainly consisted of seasonal fruit and vegetables with whatever other staples were available, such as nuts, oats, rice, lentils and large amounts of home-made bread.

With the establishment of the Sanitarium Health Food Company, vegetarian products became somewhat easier to obtain even though the cost would still have been relatively high. The range included non-dairy nut milks, coffee alternatives, breakfast cereals, biscuits, spreads and sweets, as well as its more familiar nut-based meat substitutes. The opening of health food stores by Sanitarium - and later by others - also improved food choices, although these were never cheap by general food price standards.

With the advent of better transport, canning and freezing, came the availability of fresh or preserved foods out of season. Similarly, with the emergence of supermarkets packaged and convenience foods became widely available. Until food-labelling laws came into operation in 1987, however, many vegetarians were not aware of what packaged products in supermarkets contained and so did not buy many of the items which otherwise would have been available to them.

The number of Western vegetarians has grown slowly over the years, with intermittent peaks and troughs depending on fashion. A key factor in this growth has been the general availability of appetising meat-free options. While there have always been a certain number of people who have adopted the diet for ethical reasons - irrespective of the availability of foods - there have also been many who would have liked to become vegetarian but did not because of the perceived lack of alternative foods. The growth in the number of vegetarians seems to correlate with the availability of alternative foods, their prominent placement on shop or supermarket shelves and the degree to which recipes are printed in cookbooks and journals.

Designated health food shops began appearing at the turn of the century initially primarily for the sale of Sanitarium products. In 1930 there were 10 operating in Sydney alone, and by 1939 this had grown to 30. As the market grew men such as Frederick Roberts and Henry Bloom who owned health food shops also began producing their own health products. For example, Bloom's Health Food Store was opened in Royal Arcade, Sydney in 1938, and in the 1940s he began producing his own range of cereals, supplements and seaweed products. Bloom also wrote a couple of pamphlets promoting the vegetarian diet. Although Bloom died in 1946 his company is still operating today selling supplements from its premises in Lane Cove, Sydney.

Catering for the increasing number of vegetarians in Australia - and to promote recipes utilising what were then the new Sanitarium products - there was a stream of vegetarian recipe books brought out by the Adventists through their own publishing company, Echo Publishing, and later, Signs Publishing. The first such vegetarian recipe book published in Australia was a new edition of *A Friend in the Kitchen : or, what to cook and how to cook it* (1898) by Anna L. Colcord. A previous smaller version of the book had been published in the United States (from where the Colcords originated) in 1889. The new Australian version, however, was quite different containing 400 recipes, several delightful illustrations as well as a series of cartoons extolling the vegetarian diet. While the recipes were mainly for basic meals, they did not show a lack of culinary imagination. The Adventist ideal was to “Make the living of the family what it should be - simple, economical, wholesome, nutritious, palatable, and varied.”

So successful was this excellent Australian version of the book that seventeen editions were published. It eventually went out of print only because the Colcords left the Adventist Church acrimoniously in 1914. Although an American, Anna Letitia Colcord was in Australia between 1893 and 1902 as she was married to Willard Colcord, the Secretary of the Adventist General Conference. He had come to Australia in his official capacity to work with Ellen White and her family. Willard Colcord appears to have been one of the few Adventists to promote vegetarianism for animal welfare reasons, later writing two books demonstrating his love of animals - *Animal Land* (1924) and *Wings and Paws* (1927).

From 1900 to the 1930s, various Australian editions of other American Adventist recipe books were published, including Jenny Bartlett's, *Healthful Cookery* and *Home and Health*, written by a ‘competent committee’ - both going through many editions.

Laura Ulrich (formerly Laura Lee), an Australian, opened the first health food shop in Maitland, NSW in 1900. With an American called Mrs Tuxford, Ulrich later also opened the first Adventist vegetarian café in Sydney. The recipes, which she served, were so popular that she had them published in a book entitled, *Good Food: how to prepare it* (1913) which contained, not just an

abundance of recipes, but also pro-vegetarian articles, quotes from Ellen White and words on the religious connection to the diet:

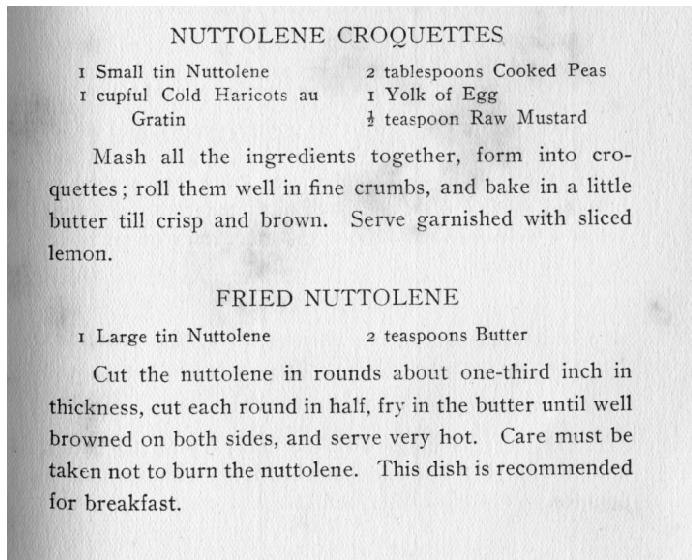
“It is a sacred duty for those who cook to learn how to prepare healthful food. Many souls are lost as the result of poor cookery. It takes thought and care to make good bread; but there is more religion in a loaf of good bread than many think.”

The Seventh Day Adventists also contributed to the promotion of the diet, and their products, by publishing journals such as *Life and Health* (1925-1936) and *Health* (1936-1968), which were not overtly religious and were aimed at a general health conscious audience.

The first fully Australian-produced vegetarian recipe book was produced sometime prior to 1902 and was written by a Mrs Hunt from Melbourne. Entitled *The Non-Flesh Diet*, it contained 60 recipes. Unfortunately no copy of this work is currently known to exist and the only evidence of it comes from vegetarian correspondence published in August 1902.

The earliest non-Adventist Australian recipe book that was fully commercially published, and for which copies still exist, was, *Dishes Without Meat*, by Alice Jevons. This undated book was published sometime between 1902 and 1914. Jevons was a young woman who had immigrated to Australia from England in 1901 and perceiving a need wrote the book to assist those who she thought “whilst desirous of excluding meat from their table, find a difficulty in replacing its nutritive properties with wholesome and appetising dishes.”

As with the Adventist publications, most of the recipes were for simple, plain foods typical of the British/Australian diet of the time. Some of Jevons’ recipes required meat replacement products such as *Nuttolene* and *Protose* as ingredients, indicating their rapid and successful acceptance by non-Adventist vegetarians.



It is interesting to note Jevons' use of *Nuttolene* (produced by the British Adventist food company Granose Foods) as an ingredient as the Australian produced Sanitarium version *Nutolene* was not manufactured in Australia until 1917. Jevons' use of this product is partly reflective of her British immigrant roots, but also shows that Australia was then still being supplied with tinned vegetarian foods from the Adventist food companies operating in Britain and the United States. Which would indicate that there were enough vegetarian consumers to make this trade economically viable.

Florence and Edgar Pritchard, a South Australian couple who had both turned vegetarian at the age of thirty to improve their health and longevity, produced other later Australian recipe books. They wrote and self-published a succession of books from the 1940s whose titles defy the need for blurbs - *A Scientific Meatless Diet: being the principles and practice of lacto-vegetarianism based on the latest scientific discoveries with original recipes*, and, *Health Culture for Everyone: good health for all based on nature as interpreted by science; pure food, fresh air, exercise; preventing illness instead of smothering the symptoms; a healthy, happy, useful life*.

These two works - and a number by Edgar Pritchard alone - were written in a mostly unsuccessful effort to bind science, Socialism, religion (primarily Theosophy) and vegetarianism into a unified theory as a panacea for all the world's ills. His theories are somewhat suspect, however, as he also wrote a hagiography of Stalin for the Australia-Soviet Friendship League!

Apart from specifically vegetarian publications, vegetarian recipes started to appear in many popular and women's journals from the 1880s. The first of these were mostly advertised as special meals for people with particular ailments and were not envisaged as part of a normal diet. It was not until around 1900 that vegetarian recipes designed as meals for general consumption appeared in popular magazines such as *Table Talk* and *Smith's Weekly*. By the 1920s, they were less of a novelty and began to appear quite frequently in women's magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly*.

Buying cooked vegetarian food before the 1940s was not as difficult as one might think. Dedicated vegetarian restaurants and cafés existed from the 1890s in most Australian capitals while many tea rooms and 'coffee palaces' supplied vegetarian foods as well. Vegetarian restaurants were widely known for their cheapness and were mostly found in Melbourne and Sydney, with a smaller number in the other capitals. Not all advertised themselves as vegetarian, some preferring to call themselves 'temperance hotels' or 'pubs'. Canny temperance advocates had realised that many of the traditional pub customers were actually looking for social interaction as much as for alcohol, and either took over the management of existing pubs or built new ones and ran them as coffee or milk bars. The food served in these establishments was almost invariably vegetarian.

The first verifiable fully vegetarian restaurant was called the *Thistle Company's Luncheon Rooms* and it was opened at 41 Little Collins Street, Melbourne in 1886. The restaurant was later called, *Mrs Harvie's Vegetarian Dining Room* and featured a dining room on the first floor (which sold hot dinners) and a café on the ground floor specialising in Scotch oatmeal cakes and gingerbread. The proprietor of the restaurant was Mrs Ellen Darcy Harvie (1844-1923) the daughter of Thomas Lang, who was both the owner of the building and one of the Vegetarian Society founders. Ellen Harvie was the mother of five children and seems to have been widowed early as her husband William makes no later appearance. Presumably having to work, she had previously run a confectioners and cake shop at 76 Powlett Street and also at 107½ Swanston Street. In all probability, these earlier establishments were also vegetarian, though it cannot be known for sure. Around 1900 Ellen Harvie's restaurant relocated to 51 Elizabeth Street (as did the Vegetarian Society offices) and operated under the simpler name, *The Thistle*. It remained open on this spot until at least 1925. Her unmarried daughter Maud Harvie (1867-1945), who eventually took over the running in about 1917, assisted Ellen in the running of the restaurant. Maud, who was also a singer, seems to have been the most active in following her mother and grandfather's vegetarianism, for she not only continued running the café, but also supported throughout her life a number of animal welfare and wildlife protection organisations.

One of Ellen Harvie's sons, Robert, also helped in the restaurant for a time, but he soon had work of his own. Trained as an engineer, in 1897 he with fellow engineer Ernest Jardine Thwaites became Australia's first filmmakers.

Much of the surviving evidence of the other vegetarian restaurants comes from advertisements and reports appearing in journals. In 1892, the Andrades opened their restaurant while, at the turn of the century, the WCTU and the Adventists also opened cafés in Melbourne. R. A. Melsom and his mother opened the first vegetarian restaurant in Sydney in 1892 at 323 George Street. Later there was the *Ceres Vegetarian Café* at 65 Victoria Parade, Castlereagh, as well as an Adventist restaurant and shop, first in Pitt Street, and later in Hunter Street. The Theosophists later again also opened a vegetarian cafe. By 1900, Adelaide, Hobart and Brisbane also had at least one vegetarian restaurant. From the 1920s restaurants that were purely commercial and not aligned with any other movement also started to appear. Most of the restaurants (or more correctly cafes) appear to have been attached to health stores and sold only light snacks during the day. So that there does not appear to have been much in the way of fine dining available until the 1970s. In 1946 however, the *Australian Women's Weekly* reported that the prominent vegetarian chef Constance Cooper had left England for Australia with her husband Gordon, to open a vegetarian restaurant in Sydney.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying the Coopers were Kay and Barry Green, who had been involved in the founding of the Vegan Society in 1944. It is not known whether this enterprise eventuated, but as the Coopers and Greens were planning on making the trip by bicycle they may not have even arrived

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s - in line with a growth in interest in Eastern spirituality (including Buddhism and Hinduism and its proselytising vegetarian organisations such as Ananda Marga and Krishna Consciousness) – vegetarianism gained many new converts. This period also coincided with the ending of the so-called 'White Australia policy' when many more people from non-European countries, in particular those from South and South East Asia were able to come to Australia and thus contribute their vegetarian culture into Australian society. Consequently there was a rapid growth in provision and then demand for Asian vegetarian food. Today, the great majority of vegetarian restaurants in Australia are now either Indian or Sri Lankan (Hindu) or Vietnamese or Cambodian (Buddhist).

Most prominent among the vegetarian restaurateurs has been Karma Dasa, an Australian convert to the Hare Krishna movement. Dasa learnt his skills in Hare Krishna restaurants, of which there are many in Australia, perfecting them whilst long-time head chef at Gopals restaurant in

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<sup>1</sup> English cyclists start journey to Australia, *Australian Women's Weekly*, Sydney, June 15, 1946, p.18

Melbourne. Dasa has also been the host of a television vegetarian cooking show and written many best- selling cookery books.