

3. Religious and Temperance Reformers

“Alcohol is a necessity,” he said. “The craving for food is recognized as legitimate, even though the rabid vegetarian seeks to snatch the chop from his brother's mouth. Yet I am asked to satisfy my desire for a drink with water! Water! Empty jam-tins are all right for goats but a hungry dog wants meat. We are but dust, add water, and we are mud.

From the novel *Here's Luck* (1930) by Lenny Lower.

The world's first Vegetarian Society was founded in England in 1847. This was soon followed by The United States, which founded its first Society in 1850. These two countries still contain the highest numbers of vegetarians of any country in the western world. Central to the founding of both the British and United States' vegetarian societies were a group of like-minded individuals belonging to a Swedenborg-influenced church called the Bible Christians.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish Christian mystic who believed that he could travel between the physical and spirit worlds and that he had been called by God to reveal this to humanity. He wrote thirty volumes of theological works which comprise that revelation. Swedenborg's writings were apparently always available to Australian settlers since copies of his books are believed to have been brought out on the First Fleet.

The Swedenborg New Church, which became the official church of the movement, was generally non-vegetarian. However many of the Swedenborgians who came to Australia to proselytise from the 1830s onwards were from this Church, and were vegetarian. The Clisby family of Adelaide were converted by these new arrivals to both vegetarianism and Swedenborg in 1847. Among the many Swedenborg-influenced vegetarians who emigrated to Australia from England were the Pitman, Moody and Chidley families who formed their own vegetarian communities in Victoria from the 1850s. But unlike Britain and the United States, Australia did not have a

cohesive group of committed vegetarians from a single religion until the arrival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1891.

While there has always been temperance advocates, the temperance movement did not really begin until the early 1830s. It began in Britain in response to an upsurge in alcoholism. The sweeping technical and social changes of the Industrial Revolution - which concentrated populations into cities and collapsed rural society - provided cheap alcohol as a balm for miserable and hungry city workers. With alcohol easier and cheaper to obtain than clean water or fresh milk, it became a plague on the poor and remained so until the outbreak of the First World War.

Alcoholism had been a major problem in colonial Australia almost from its inception. The first drunken orgy occurred when the female convict ship, *The Lady Juliana*, arrived in 1790. Many of Australia's early vegetarians were also those who took an active part in the temperance movement. While Australia did not have the soul-destroying factories and mills that drove British workers to drink, it did have the heat of her climate to promote a steady thirst. Add to this the fact that Australians had as easy access to cheap alcohol as they did to cheap meat, and it is understandable why alcoholism became so prevalent. As a consequence, there were always social reformers on hand to preach against the 'demon drink'. Vegetarianism's being so closely aligned with the temperance movement probably did little to promote its acceptance in the general population. In fact it is more likely to have created only resistance as Australians have always had a natural suspicion of wowseryism.

When the British and German immigrants came to Australia in the late 1830s and early 1840s, many of them brought with them temperance ideas. Temperance journals and newspapers - which had previously only been available from Britain - began to be published in Australia from 1840. In Tasmania, temperance was particularly strong, probably because of the large number of Quakers and members of other non-conformist religious groups arriving in the community.

The Independent Order of Rechabites was an organisation founded in Salford in England in 1835 that, thanks to the vegetarian church reformers William Cowherd and Joseph Brotherton, was the vegetarian centre of Britain. This order, which was similar to many other friendly societies of the time, provided mutual support in case of sickness or death. What set it apart from others is that its members were required to abstain from all intoxicating liquors and its first secretary (and author of its ritual and code) was the vegetarian, Joseph Thompson.

While the abstention from alcohol among Rechabites was enforced, vegetarianism was not, but the number of vegetarians in the order would probably have had some influence. The first branch of the order in Australia was founded in Sydney in April, 1842, with branches soon

following in Tasmania. Although the Rechabites established themselves in South Australia and New South Wales, it was in Tasmania that the organisation really took hold and still exists today.

In the early 1840s the first vegetarians began to appear from among the various temperance organisations. While abstaining from meat was not fully endorsed let alone enforced, meat eating was still seen as something that was not particularly noble, as the masthead of the *Van Diemen's Land Temperance Herald* (1845) which carried the Bible quotation implied:

“It is good neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak.” - *Rom. xiv.21*

The term ‘total abstainer’, which was in widespread use amongst temperance groups, was often recognised as indicating that a person abstained from meat as well as alcohol.

When, in 1894, Margaret O’Kavanagh wrote to ask whether the Seventh Day Adventists were total abstainers, Ellen White replied:

“I am happy to assure you that as a denomination we are in the fullest sense total abstainers from the use of spirituous liquors, wine, beer, [fermented] cider, and also tobacco and all other narcotics... All are vegetarians, many abstaining wholly from the use of flesh food, while others use it in only the most moderate degree.”¹

All religions of the Abrahamaic tradition - Christianity, Islam and Judaism - have seen meat as being in some way unclean and ungodly. All have proscribed the eating of certain types of meat, have determined ways of slaughtering animals or proclaimed periods when no meat can be eaten, while viewing abstinence as a way to physical purity and greater spirituality. In Australia, abstaining from meat was an accepted part of Christian practice. Catholics were expected to refrain from eating meat for six weeks during Lent, although various papal indulgences have gradually eroded this stricture. Most, however, persisted in eating fish (i.e. ‘not meat’) on Fridays while many individuals within the non-conformist, Methodist, Anglican and Quaker communities managed to abstain from meat for the entire week. So prominent was the diet within the Quaker faith that it had its own vegetarian and animal welfare organisations from the 1890s.

¹ White, Ellen, Letter 99, Jan. 8, 1894, Manuscript Releases, Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate

In the 19th Century there was a huge growth in the number of new religious groups, from Christian Scientists to the Mormons. Many, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church and The Salvation Army, were made up primarily of former Methodists and most espoused some form of vegetarianism at some time. This is not surprising as John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was himself a vegetarian and consequently so were many of his flock.

The reasons why Christian vegetarians abstained from eating meat are many. William Bramwell Booth - the second general of the Salvation Army and eldest son of its founder, William Booth (also a some-time vegetarian) - wrote a pamphlet in which he stated the 19 reasons why he was a vegetarian, three of which are those given by most Christian vegetarians:

- a vegetarian diet is favourable to purity, to chastity, and to perfect control of the appetites and passions which are often a source of great temptation, especially to the young
- meat-eating is cruel
- according to the Bible God originally intended the food for humans to be vegetarian

In the last reason Booth refers to the following passage from the *Genesis 1:29*:

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”

The Salvation Army in Australia however, was never actively associated with vegetarianism, even though Booth recommended the diet in his *Orders and Regulations for the Officers of the Salvation Army*. It is presumed that making the diet part of the movement in Australia would have deterred recruitment for the new organisation which, given Australia's dietary habits, was probably correct. The only notable exception to this policy was Ensign Grinling (editor of the journal the *War Cry*) who lectured on vegetarianism in the mid 1890s at the behest of the NSW Vegetarian Society.

The first Mormon missionaries arrived in Australia in 1851, although some members of their Church had come out previously from England. Mormons today are not vegetarian and are, in fact, now opposed to the diet. Early Mormons, however, may have been guided more by the revelations of their prophet Joseph Smith, who said that meat “should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine.”

Or from the statements of Brigham Young who wrote in his *Journal of Discourses* in 1852:

“Let the people be holy, and filled with the Spirit of God, and every animal and creeping thing will be filled with peace; the soil of the earth will bring forth its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat for man. The more purity that exists, the less is the strife; the more kind we are to our animals, the more will peace increase, and the savage nature of the brute creation vanish away.”

How well those early Mormons in Australia adhered to this wise and compassionate advice we cannot know.

Another American import to Australia was the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), a movement which had begun in the United States in 1874 and soon spread to the rest of the English-speaking world. By the late 1880s there were thriving branches in most Australian states. Apart from promoting temperance, the Australian WCTU was also of seminal importance in getting women involved in politics by playing a leading part in the suffragist movement. Its involvement was not so much for women’s advocacy *per se*, but as a means of enfranchising its members so that they could force temperance onto the political agenda. This they achieved, making some areas of Australia dry to alcohol.

The WCTU was also a decidedly vegetarian organisation. The American leadership, containing as it did Ella Kellogg, May Yates and Lillian Stevens, was almost entirely vegetarian. In Australia, vegetarians in the WCTU were also largely to the fore. Vegetarian activity went to the extent of running a vegetarian café in Melbourne and by having its members deliver dietary lectures across Australia and otherwise promote vegetarianism. The WCTU was so identified with vegetarianism that the *Bulletin* lampooned it with this poem:

For years and years the frenzied soul has raised himself upon a cask

To give the demon drink his dole of frantic stoush; but now we ask

That he will turn his righteous heat

Upon the wicked things we eat;

And take a turn at outing meat

...

Pigshead, not hogshead, spells despair;

The foe is cutlets, never hops.

Who takes the pledge henceforth will swear

He'll not taste, or handle chops.

And good teetotal people must combine with fevered zeal to bust

That dreadful Beef and Mutton Trust.²

This was printed after the *Bulletin* had reported the WCTU as stating in its Melbourne convention of 1912:

“It was being recognised more and more that flesh food was more impure than vegetarian food. The person who never ate meat had never been known to be a drunkard, and a drunkard had never been known to be a vegetarian.”

This belief that meat promoted alcoholism was well-established in many temperance eyes by this time. The Salvation Army, at the behest of General Bramwell Booth and his wife Florence, had been ‘curing’ alcoholics - with some success - in its British hostels for several years by enforcing a vegetarian diet on them.

Robert Jones - President of the Australian Vegetarian Society in 1888 and a guest speaker at the International Temperance Conference held in Melbourne in the same year - described approvingly the findings of the well-known American vegetarian, Dr James Jackson, who ran a sanatorium in Dansville, N.Y., to the effect that:

“All his efforts to reform a drunkard were futile until he deprived him of the use of flesh food, and that, on the other hand out of 100 confirmed drunkards, he succeeded in curing ninety-eight in his hygienic institution by simply withdrawing flesh and tobacco, prescribing baths and a diet of fruits and grains. On such a diet, he says, the desire for alcohol almost dies out of a man, and

² Snell, Silas (Dyson, Edward), *The Accursed Meat*, in, *The Bulletin*, vol.33 no.1710, 21 November 1912 (p.12)

children brought up on that food rarely fall victims to strong drink, unless trained to its use, for their blood is pure, their nerves supplied with proper nutrient, their muscles full and cordy, and their bones strong.”³

The lessons from these overseas establishments were later to be used in Australia. Firstly in Melbourne where the Seventh-day Adventists established a hostel in 1895 and later when a ‘Tyson cure’ was apparently used by a local Magistrate to cure hopeless drunks.⁴ In Sydney, the Methodist Medical Retreat (founded in 1897) began to offer ‘a purely vegetable cure’ to its patients. Run by a Dr McClelland, formerly Medical Superintendent of Sydney Hospital, this retreat treated dipsomaniacs and drug addicts whether Methodist or not.⁵

The Methodist Church had many vegetarian supporters including the Rev. John Higgins who was one of the founders of the Australian Vegetarian Society, as well as its first president. A teetotal Wesleyan sect called the Bible Christians (which later amalgamated with the Methodist Church) also had vegetarian supporters in Australia, most notably the Hon. Dr Allan Campbell. Campbell was a Member of Parliament from South Australia who corresponded with the fledgling Vegetarian Society in the 1880s.

Apart from those cloistered within vegetarian monastic orders, the Catholic Church has never publicly advocated vegetarianism and, in many cases, has been totally opposed to it. In Australia, however, it can lay claim to one indefatigable champion of vegetarianism - Mrs Margaret O’Kavanagh (nee Watson, 1838-1912). O’Kavanagh was a migrant from County Tipperary in Ireland who arrived in Melbourne in 1857 aged 19.

Margaret married a draper; Eugene O’Kavanagh and worked with him in their business in Hotham until his untimely death in 1879. In 1876 she had taken up vegetarianism as a penance but after a time on the diet said it was no penance but was in fact the "healthiest, and

³ Jones, Robert, *Vegetarianism, with special reference to its connection with Temperance in drinking* : lecture (enlarged) delivered before the Melbourne Total Abstinence Society at the Temperance Hall, Russell-St., on the 10th April, 1888, 2nd ed. / ed. by Joseph Knight, Melbourne : Manchester : George Robertson ; The Vegetarian Society, 1889

⁴ Meares, Edward, *Vegetable diet in health and disease*, Melbourne, 1893, p.10

⁵ Colwell, J, *The Illustrated History of Methodism : Australia, 1812 to 1855, New South Wales and Polynesia, 1856 to 1902*, Sydney, William Brooks & Co., 1904, p.549

consequently the happiest mode of existing here; and, further, all who aspire to a spiritual life will find it not only curb, but extinguish, all animal passions."

After her husband's death, O'Kavanagh dreamed of establishing a religious community that would build upon her two overriding passions - the promotion of the Catholic Church and the spreading of vegetarianism in the new colony, and for many years sought Church support for this. In 1887, after many years of persuasion, and having now the proceeds of the sale of the drapery business, Mrs O'Kavanagh was given permission to found her lay order by the Most Rev. Thomas Carr, Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne. The church monastery and retreat that she founded went by the alluring name of the Zion Erin Cottage and was in Cape Street, Heidelberg. The order she founded to inhabit this establishment was called the Zion Erin Crusade of the Cross. The order admitted only 'pious men - single or widowed and pious women - virgins and widows under the age of 58' and also preferably of Irish stock. That vegetarianism was uppermost in her mind in this community can be seen in the three vows and rules that the members had to adhere to:

'Firstly, Total abstinence from all spirituous and fermented drink; from all flesh, fish, and fowl, or broth or gravy extracted from said flesh, fish, or fowl. Persons seeking to mitigate or alter this rule for themselves or others, must vacate their vocation and relation with said Monastery in favour of persons stronger in the practice of self-denial.

Secondly, Chastity.

Thirdly, Obedience.⁶

The home rather than creating a thriving vegetarian community seemingly functioned more as a vegetarian hospice and thus attracted terminally ill Catholics, some no doubt for want of anywhere else to go. In the obituary pages of the Catholic newspaper *The Advocate* can be seen the evidence that many folk passed their last days there.

Mrs O'Kavanagh wrote of spreading her order across Australia and, from there, as far and wide as Jerusalem and America. With no evidence of the monastery existing after her death it seems sadly that her order never progressed beyond her Melbourne home.

Vegetarian temperance views were also to be found in the Anglican Church. Alfred Barry - bishop of Sydney and primate of Australia from 1886 to 1889 - who had already caused upset to

⁶ Zion Erin Crusade of the Cross, *The Vegetarian*, London, July 25, 1891, p. 395

his low church congregation with the installation of a reredos, found himself the subject of heated attacks after he had raised the connection between alcohol and meat consumption. True to form, the *Bulletin* mocked him with the publication of an entire page of satirical cartoons as well as a poem entitled, 'Prime-Meat Barry's Patter Song: The Bishop's Prevarication; or 'It's Owing to the Meat'', which contains the lines:

I find it is reported in a wicked Sydney sheet

that I told the English people the Australian

elite

were sensual and lawless and consumed their

whisky neat.

Now what I really said to them I'll with your

leave repeat:

I said that you were wicked, but I laid the blame

on meat

I told them that for beauty none could with your

girls compete

They were elegant and neat, they were sweet, but

indiscreet

But I said their indiscretion was brought on by

eating meat

I told them that your working man his wife and

children beat,

'Twas not drink that made him do it - it was

what he had to eat.⁷

7 May, Phil, Prime-Meat Barry's Patter Song: The Bishop's Prevarication; or "It's Owing to the Meat" in, *The Bulletin*, vol.8 no.392 6 August 1887,

This satirical dig was in response to a lecture on Australia given by Barry in London and which *The Sydney Morning Herald* (among other newspapers) reported in which he supposedly implied that Australians were excessively sensual and ill-mannered because of their high meat consumption. After a storm of protest he attempted to clarify this by stating:

“The comparatively fuller diet constituted special temptation, against which we [Australians] had a hard struggle.”⁸

Only a relatively small number of Christians were vegetarian or vegetarian supporters. Indeed in the late Victorian era a number of Australian Christian missionaries were going out to other lands, in particular to Asia, actively promoting a meat diet as part of a Christian lifestyle. So much so that a Mr Lacey of Tasmania wrote to the vegetarian press asking that all Christians desist in supporting any missionary activity in countries such as India which had a vegetarian majority.

The locals also at times did not take kindly to the promotion of a meat diet. In August 1895, vegetarian members of a Buddhist sect at Whasanh (Hua Sang), China killed, amongst others, three female Australian Christian missionaries. According to the vegetarian press the Christians eating of flesh and proselytising a faith that included eating the body of Christ had instilled so much hate and mistrust, that the attack was somewhat justified.⁹

There would undoubtedly have been some vegetarians among Jewish Australians. The Jewish community has promoted aspects of animal welfare for thousands of years and many of the past champions of the vegetarian and animal welfare movements have come from the Jewish faith. It is estimated that Israel is second only to India in having the largest proportion of the population that is vegetarian. Jews were also the only religious group to have created their own organised Vegetarian Societies, a branch of which is still in operation in Australia. Peter Singer - probably the most important current voice in animal rights and moral philosophy in general - comes from this heritage.

Many of the early Australian Jewish vegetarians would probably have been among the most religious of people (chief rabbis, for example, have frequently been vegetarian).

The majority of Australian Jews however would have been meat eaters (albeit with kosher rules), and it is to be expected that many who weren't so when they arrived would soon have become so

⁸ Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July 1887, pp.6 & 10 and 29 July 1887, p.3.

⁹ Tsai-li and the missionary massacres, *Vegetarian Review*, London, no. 49 Sept. 1895. p.290-294

to conform to the *mores* of Australian society. The pressure on migrants to Australia - especially non-Christians - to conform to Australian norms was very strong up until quite recently.

There were exceptions, however, such as the Finley family who were “the only Jewish vegetarians in Perth.”¹⁰ This family, which lived in the suburb of North Perth, had become vegetarian in the early 1930s for ethical reasons. Hetty Finley, the family’s eldest child, and her mother had attended a lecture entitled ‘Christmas as Seen through the Eyes of a Turkey.’ Hetty went on to be active in many animal welfare and vegetarian groups as did other members of her family. This was not part of any Jewish vegetarian movement as none existed until the formation of the International Jewish Vegetarian Society (which the Finleys joined in the mid 1960s). Their experience is similar to that of many ‘normal’ vegetarian families - they were not part of an organised vegetarian group which taught vegetarianism, they had made the ethical choice themselves, knew no other vegetarians and were probably unaware of the existence of any organised vegetarian society.

There would undoubtedly have been early Hindu and Buddhist visitors to Australia, but there is no record of their vegetarianism. In 1900 there were around 4500 Hindus in Australia but the introduction of the so-called ‘White Australia policy’ in 1901 would have practically put an end to immigration from most of the nations that adhere to Hinduism and Buddhism and so their numbers began to fall. However, western exponents of these religions could and did manage to immigrate to Australia. In 1911, the 11 year old Marie Beuzeville Byles came out to Australia from England with her vegetarian parents. Byles, later in 1924 became one of the first woman solicitors in New South Wales after graduating in law from Sydney University. A mountaineer, traveller, conservationist, pacifist and author she was also a Buddhist and was a founding member of the Buddhist Society of New South Wales. A life long vegetarian she stated near the end of her long life that she had never even tasted meat. Her earliest travel book, *By cargo boat & mountain: the unconventional experiences of a woman on tramp round the world* (1931) recounts how she got by on raw fruit, brown bread and the occasional salad. Something she continued to do, even whilst walking and climbing mountains around the world.

Another traveller was Frederick Whittle (1902-1995) who ventured to Burma in the 1950s to become a Buddhist monk. After his return to Australia Whittle later became the president of the

¹⁰ Fraser, Gina, personal email 18 July, 2003

Buddhist Society of Victoria as well as one of the three founders of the Vegan Society of Victoria in August 1973.

Another prominent Buddhist was Frank Lee Woodward (1871 -1952). Born the son of an Anglican clergyman in England, Woodward later became a Buddhist, a Theosophist and vegetarian after a personal spiritual crisis whilst a young man. After completion of his studies at Cambridge University he became a schoolmaster and then for 16 years the principal of a Theosophist school in Sri Lanka. Moving to Tasmania in 1919 Woodward gave up teaching to concentrate on his scholarly pursuits. Buying a cottage with a small apple orchard near Launceston, he set about translating Buddhist texts into English, eventually managing to translate a large number of works, his most famous being *Some Sayings of the Buddha* (1925).¹¹

The two main proselysing Hindu groups, which brought vegetarianism in their wake to Australia, were the Ananda Marga and the Hare Krishnas organisations.

Ananda Marga is a sect which promotes yoga and meditation as well as emphasising social justice. Founded in India in 1955, it is based on the teachings of Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar. The group began making converts in Australia in the early 1970s and by the mid 1970s Ananda Marga centres (offering yoga instruction) were operating in most major cities. Apart from its spiritual activities, Ananda Marga also promoted vegetarianism and from their premises made vegetarian foodstuffs and information freely available.

The Hare Krishna (or International Society of Krishna Consciousness) is a Hindu organization founded in the United States in 1965 by Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977). Its followers live a somewhat monastic life, part of which requires adherence to vegetarianism. The movement came to Australia in the early 1970s setting up religious groups in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

The Hare Krishna's became for a time primarily associated with conversions, chanting processions in major shopping thoroughfares and 'begging'. In the late 1970s with a backlash against organisations deemed by some as cults, the Hare Krishna's moved away from street activities and decided to further develop its vegetarian restaurants as centres to attract followers/inquirers and to make money for their works through selling their excellent food.

For those who could not afford to eat in their restaurants they also started providing free vegetarian meals for the transient population of Sydney's King Cross. This free food program, known as Food for Life, continues to this day in Newtown, Sydney and is pursued in line with

¹¹ Croucher, Paul, *Buddhism in Australia 1848-1988*, Kensington, New South Wales University Press, 1989, pp.21-22

the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, who asked Krishna followers to not allow anyone within a ten mile radius of their temples to go hungry.