

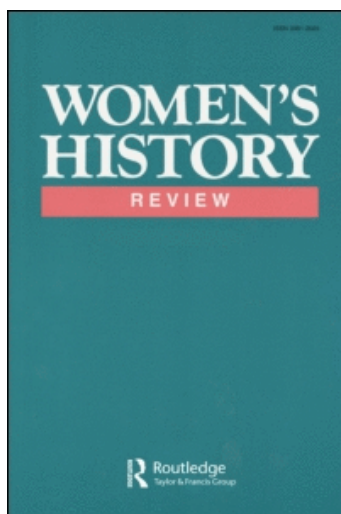
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The Awakened Instinct: vegetarianism and the women's suffrage movement in Britain

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ABSTRACT This article examines the extent to which vegetarianism was found in the militant and non-militant strands of the women's suffrage movement, and looks at some of the other movements contributing to vegetarian and suffrage thinking. The arguments linking the two movements are discussed, ranging from the psychological identification of women with animals as victims of male brutality, to the empowering idea that women confined to a homemaker's role could still help to create a new and more compassionate world by adopting a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism and the women's movement are seen as linked with each other, and also with theosophy and socialism, as complementary ways of creating that longed-for new world.

"It is a strange fact that the ranks of the militant suffragettes are mostly recruited from the mild vegetarians", wrote Maud Joachim in *My Life in Holloway Gaol* in 1908, "and the authorities have allowed us a special vegetarian diet." [1] Can this 'strange fact' possibly be true? Search the index of any one of the innumerable secondary source books on the women's suffrage movement in Britain and 'vegetarianism' will not be found. This important component of Edwardian feminism has faded into oblivion. [2]

Given this lack of mention of the connection in the standard histories of the movement, the first part of this paper must examine whether vegetarianism was indeed widespread amongst suffragists. The second part looks at some of the other movements contributing to social and dietary reform, and the third considers why that dietary choice was made by so many Edwardian feminists.

I

In the Edwardian period there were three major suffrage organisations. The oldest was the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), which campaigned by 'constitutional' methods. Next came the Pankhursts' militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which transformed the movement, and third was the breakaway Women's Freedom League (WFL). Before the WSPU's espousal of violence toward the end of 1912 some suffragettes belonged to both militant organisations simultaneously, but in spite of the overlap in membership the organisations were quite distinct in tactics, style and leadership. The first question, in view of Maud Joachim's comment on militancy, is which of them was associated with vegetarianism.

The president of the WFL, the redoubtable Charlotte Despard, was herself a keen vegetarian (her ideas on the connection with the women's movement will be explored later), so there was a role model there for WFL members. A photo series of 'Suffragettes at Home' in the WFL journal, *The Vote*, in 1910, included a picture of Mrs Agnes Leonard, honorary secretary of Sheffield branch, cooking a vegetarian dinner, with the note that she was "an expert vegetarian cook". In January 1911 Dundee branch heard a lecture on 'The Ethics of Food Reform' by "Mr Dan Hamilton, a well-known vegetarian". Toward the end of 1912, at the Edinburgh branch "an exceedingly interesting demonstration of Vegetarian Cookery was given by Miss MacDonald (Glasgow), assisted by members of the Edinburgh Vegetarian Society." [3]

These were not just individual interests, but part of the WFL ethos, which continued long after the vote had been won. During the war years the Women's Freedom League opened vegetarian restaurants in various parts of the country; the one in Holborn was praised in the popular press as "a charming place" and "entirely inviting". [4] Jean Petrie, whose mother was a WFL activist in Edinburgh, both during and after the suffrage period, remembers that at least two of her 'aunts by courtesy' were vegetarian, and that her own mother was very much that way inclined. [5]

It was WSPU militants like Maud Joachim who were likeliest to find themselves in jail. Another of the Holloway prisoners in the 1907-8 period whom Maud Joachim must have been thinking of was Margaret C. Clayton, who wrote:

Dinner is supplied in two tins. In the deeper one lurk two potatoes in their skins; in the shallower, which fits into the top of the other, are an egg, and some cauliflower or other vegetable. Many of us are always vegetarians, and acting on expert advice, others are so pro tem., for the meat supplied is so generally disliked. [6]

This was also borne out by the Vegetarian Society's journal of April 1907:

It is interesting to see how vegetarianism becomes related to progressive movements. Quite a number of the leaders in the Women's Suffragist movement are vegetarians. On the whole they have been kindly treated by the prison officials, but they assert that the ordinary mixed prison food that is supplied is not of the most palatable kind, so that suffragists who now go to prison are advised to be vegetarian, as the food supplied to vegetarians is nicer in every way. The suffragists now invariably breakfast at the Eustace Miles Restaurant, on being released from Holloway.[7]

Particularly good evidence for the pervasiveness of vegetarianism within the WSPU comes from the diaries of the Blathway family (Colonel and Mrs Blathway and their daughter Mary), who lived in Batheaston, Somerset, and regularly entertained WSPU members as guests. On 30 April 1910 Mrs Blathway recorded that Marion Wallace Dunlop (the first suffragette to adopt the hunger strike) and Florence Haig (a sculptor who was several times imprisoned), "like so many of them, never eat meat and not much animal food at all". On 27 February 1911 she recorded that Mr Rogers (who worked for the Men's League for Women's Suffrage), and his wife came to lunch. Mrs Rogers was "like so many suffrage people and did not eat the chicken, but she had vegetables, bread sauce, cream etc." A few days later (5 March 1911) she noted that Charlotte Marsh (a WSPU organiser, many times imprisoned and forcibly fed) "has begun the late custom of not taking meat or chicken." And on 17 March Colonel Blathway recorded that Mrs Jane Brailsford (wife of H.N. Brailsford, an important Liberal journalist) "like so many Suffragettes is a vegetarian, but she took Burgundy." The keenest militants locally were the Tollemaches (mother and two daughters), suspected of burning down an empty house in Bath. On 8 January 1914 Mary Blathway wrote in her diary: "Tollemaches have advertised for their dog Bladud, who is in the habit of running away, but this time has stayed. I expect he would rather not live with vegetarians." [8]

There is also evidence from other sources. Phoebe Hesketh wrote that her aunt, Edith Rigby, secretary of the WSPU's Preston branch from 1907 onwards, and several times imprisoned, was a vegetarian. Her friend, Mrs Higginson, who acted as secretary of the Preston branch when Mrs Rigby was in jail, owned and ran the local health food store.[9] The matron of a vegetarian orphanage in Edinburgh, Elizabeth Finlayson Gauld, and her assistant, Jean Lambie, were two of the most active WSPU members in Scotland.[10] Victoria Lidiard, who spent two months in Holloway after taking part in the WSPU's window smashing exercise in March 1912, later recalled the prison authorities' total ignorance of a vegetarian diet, having given her the absurd quantity of "almost half a pound of butter beans".[11] Mrs Leonora Cohen, honorary secretary of Leeds branch, imprisoned for smashing the glass case of the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London, considered her vegetarianism important enough to be mentioned in the

Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who of 1913; during the war years she did cookery demonstrations for the Vegetarian Society.[12] Grace Roe, her companion in window-smashing, and in Holloway, was also vegetarian.[13]

As there is no suggestion that any of the Pankhursts, or Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, were vegetarian, the WSPU did not have any official leaders as role models, but they certainly did have at least one charismatic figure to look up to. Lady Constance Lytton, an ardent WSPU member, was released from Newcastle jail because of her very real heart condition. To demonstrate the double standard of justice, she disguised herself as a working-class woman, Jane Warton, before engaging on another stone-throwing exercise in Liverpool. She was arrested, went on hunger strike, and was forcibly fed in Walton jail; her health never recovered from her ordeal. Lady Constance told this story in her book, *Prisons and Prisoners* and made an explicit link there between vegetarianism and feminism which will be discussed later.

However, there was more than one mention of vegetarianism in her book. At Holloway in 1909 she "asked to be allowed flannel underclothing and vegetarian food." The midday meal, she wrote, consisted of "fried fish, potatoes, cabbage, bread, butter and a custard pudding or boiled rice pudding. . . I being a vegetarian, did not eat fish." As Jane Warton in Liverpool, having a final meal before venturing out to throw stones: "My kind hostess had heard that I was a vegetarian, and had provided a most appetising dish of stewed white pears." In Walton jail when she was forcibly fed with Bovril, she "had the strongest objection to it of a vegetarian kind, and I begged him not to give it to me again. . . It was only when I was sick that I knew what were the ingredients put down my body." [14] Constance Lytton's vegetarianism was a central part of her identity, and anyone who came in contact with her must have known this.

There is plenty of evidence for vegetarianism within the WFL and WSPU, but what about the non-militant wing of the movement? Dr Alice Ker of Liverpool, herself a vegetarian, was unusual in switching her allegiance from the 'constitutionalists' to the militants. In her diary in March 1912 (in Holloway) she wrote: "this is a true spiritual movement, there is no doubt. I really don't think the National Union have at all the same deep feeling of the inward meaning of the whole movement; at least, I never felt it when I belonged to them." [15] There was undoubtedly a strand of what we might call 'New Age' spiritual fervour present in the WSPU, less discernible amongst the more 'down to earth' constitutionalists. But this does not mean that vegetarianism was absent from the non-militant wing of the movement.

Prior to the establishment of the WSPU by the Pankhursts, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth had begun to mobilise women in the Lancashire cotton factories to campaign for the vote, and they remained committed to constitutional methods throughout the Edwardian period. Suffragist, poet,

Irish nationalist, and pacifist, Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926) was a vegetarian for the last 26 years of her life.[16] Two of the most active members of the Portsmouth branch of the NUWSS, the sisters Nora and Margaret O'Shea, "also devoted themselves to the welfare of animals, vegetarianism and the study of herbal remedies".[17] Naturally, the more left-wing, socialist-oriented members of the NUWSS were likeliest to be vegetarian. Ada Nield Chew, a very active working-class NUWSS organiser, was one such.[18] Isabella Ford, another NUWSS activist and committed socialist, was also a vegetarian (on 'humanitarian' grounds).[19]

On 26 October 1911 the International Women's Franchise Club held a dinner at the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly. The president of this club was the Earl of Lytton; membership cost a guinea a year, and there was an additional guinea entrance fee for members who lived in London, so women had to be well off financially to join. Diners were offered a choice of an ordinary or vegetarian menu, and 25 (out of approximately 130) chose the vegetarian menu.[20]

Not all of the vegetarians were named, as some were simply labelled as guests of a particular member, and so far it has been possible to trace the affiliations of only a few with any degree of certainty. All three organisations were well represented. Two were definitely active in the WSPU, and three others probably were as well; two were WFL members, two were active in the Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association, and one – Helena Auerbach – was honorary treasurer of the NUWSS as well as a vice-president of the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage.[21] So, although vegetarianism may have been more prevalent in the militant than in the non-militant wing of the movement, the ethos was clearly present and well-accepted in the latter as well.

II

A key period for the vegetarian movement, as for so many other social movements, was the late nineteenth century, and at least some of the women featured in this paper – e.g. Constance Lytton, Leonora Cohen, and Victoria Lidiard – became vegetarian long before becoming involved in the women's suffrage movement.[22]

A school of thought known as 'food reform', which held that meat was responsible for many illnesses which could be alleviated or cured by switching to a vegetarian diet, was well established. Some suffragists came to their vegetarianism via that route, though invariably they subsequently adopted an ethical stance as well. For example, Constance Lytton had suffered from what she called 'constitutional' rheumatism from infancy, and it was due to her aunt's 'investigations in theories of diet' that she switched to a vegetarian regime and thereby 'gradually freed' herself from her condition. But she "realised, too, that all these years I had caused untold

suffering that I might be fed, and determined that in future the unnatural death of an animal should not be necessary to make up my bill of fare.”[23]

It was Leonora Cohen’s mother who adopted vegetarianism for her whole family when Leonora was only a child. Her father died of tuberculosis, aged only 29, and Leonora “became infected around my neck. . . so I was very ill up to seven years of age. . . always swathed in linseed poultices.” A Professor Wells from Scarborough told her mother that “it would be quite possible for us to grow up without a stain of tuberculosis if we could follow a clean diet. So my mother promptly adhered to this strictly. And I’m the same.”[24] However, in 1915 she declared that she “had had the good fortune to be brought up a Vegetarian and she would stick to the diet because she believed it was the best. But even if it were not the best she would still adhere to it from humanitarian motives.”[25]

The roots of the link between vegetarianism and feminism lay in the 1890s, as manifested in the radical journal, *Shafts*, edited by Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp from November 1892 to the beginning of 1899. Two early articles (February and May 1893), entitled ‘To Beginners’, provided advice on how to go about adopting a vegetarian diet. There was no attempt to put forward any rationale for doing so; it was clearly felt to be self-evident. In April 1895 the journal advised that a Women’s Vegetarian Union had been started in London. The first ‘At Home’ was at the house of Mrs C. Leigh Hunt Wallace, editor of the *Herald of Health*, “and earnest worker towards the adoption of rational costume.” The next public meeting was chaired by Mrs Shurmer Sibthorp, the editor of *Shafts*. (There was no further mention of the organisation after that.)[26]

Shafts also featured other aspects of animal welfare, with articles in early issues on the cruelty of hunting. During the Edwardian suffrage period concern was also manifested on such related issues as the wearing of fur. In one of her scrapbooks Maude Arncliffe-Sennett pasted in some advertisements of models in fur coats and scribbled alongside: “These women all seem to me hateful – they represent so much killing!”[27] And when the NUSWSS journal, the *Common Cause*, was debating in 1913 whether to carry some kind of fashion column, Ada Nield Chew argued in favour, as guidance was much needed on the best and most practical clothing for campaigning, and advice would be particularly appreciated on “how to look and feel warm in winter without swathing oneself in dead animals’ skins”. [28]

The cruelty involved in the decoration to Edwardian ladies’ hats was another related concern that surfaced in the suffrage press. In February 1909, with regard to the millinery stall at the planned-for Women’s Exhibition, a plea was made in the WSPU journal, *Votes for Women*, that women would “take the opportunity of dissociating themselves from ‘Murderous Millinery’,” and that the hats and bonnets with “ospreys and the stuffed bodies of birds” would be “conspicuous by their absence”. Others

wrote in to support this stance and to “try to get a stop put to the cruel, inhuman and revolting fashion of using beautiful birds for the purpose of personal adornment.”[29]

A running motif throughout the existence of Shafts was anti-vivisection, a very strong movement in late Victorian Britain.[30] However, the leading Victorian feminist anti-vivisection campaigner, Frances Power Cobbe, was not a vegetarian, and it seems that many women in the movement did not go beyond anti-vivisection to contemplate other forms of cruelty to animals. George Bernard Shaw described attending an anti-vivisection rally in London where “the ladies among us wore hats and cloaks and head-dresses obtained by wholesale massacres, ruthless trappings, callous extermination of our fellow creatures”.[31] However, the vegetarian suffragists were certainly anti-vivisectionists and, as we shall see below, one of the most eloquent speakers on the link between vegetarianism and feminism was Louise Lind-af-Hageby, who enrolled at the London School of Medicine for Women in order to expose the cruelties of vivisection.[32]

Another important system of thought in late Victorian Britain was Theosophy. Women were involved from the outset, and the Theosophical Society offered them “opportunities for self-expression and leadership denied them by the established churches and by most of the other sects”. Theosophy also provided “a theoretical legitimation at the highest cosmological level for mundane notions of equality between the sexes.”[33] With its basis in Hinduism, Theosophy naturally encouraged vegetarianism amongst its members.

Of course, all those strands, as well as socialism and other movements for greater equality and justice in society, overlapped to a greater or lesser degree in different individuals.

III

Margaret Cousins, addressing the Vegetarian Society in 1907, stressed a very practical reason for women to switch to a simple grain/fruit/nut diet: the amount of time they would save by not having to spend hours in the kitchen preparing (or overseeing the preparation of) meat meals. Unlike the priority given to the franchise by most women involved in the suffrage movement, Mrs Cousins was equally active in the Irish Women’s Franchise League and the Irish Vegetarian Society, speaking and writing on both subjects and demonstrating the close connection she saw between them.[34] With freedom from the necessity of preparing complex cooked meals would come women’s emancipation, she argued, but this did not mean “the reign of idleness or the opportunity for all kinds of selfish pleasures.” She was anxious to “help women to free their hands and their minds in every possible way, for in the present absurd housekeeping arrangements a woman truly has ‘no time to think’. . . and if she should get an hour of rest

and quiet, she is physically so used up that she has no desire to worry her mind with intellectual and social problems." By changing to a vegetarian diet women would have time:

during which to think over problems in life which their experience enables them to cope with better than men, and as a result there would be a more spontaneous and all-pervading demand from all women for an equal opportunity with men for service in the state. Thus the Suffrage movements are more closely connected with the Food Reform movement than the enthusiasts of either are usually aware of.[35]

This was a problematic argument, since labour-saving devices could have achieved that end as easily, but it was only one of many views put forward.

For example, Mrs Cousins emphasised the effects on the "fine and sensitive nature of a woman" of the preparation of flesh foods. As Charlotte Despard put it: "Vegetarianism is pre-eminently a woman's question. It is horrible to think that women should have to handle and cook dead flesh." [36] Margaret Cousins took this beyond the mere question of unpleasantness. A woman, she wrote:

instinctively shrinks at first from having to touch raw meat, from having to disgorge the entrails of fowl, game and fish. . . but through repetition of these unpleasant so-called duties, and through constant visits to the butcher's shop, a veritable veil of blood envelops us by degrees, which obscures the intuitions of our better selves from us, and at length causes us to be content with that against which we at first rightly rebelled.[37]

This aspect (which did, of course, perpetuate 'separate spheres' ideology) was a keynote of *A Modern Crusader*, by Florence Edgar Hobson, a play written, and performed by the Pioneer Players, as a contribution to the first National Health Week in 1912. Much of the play was direct propaganda for food reform. The hero, Tom, is a doctor who receives a frosty reception from the village where he tries to set up a practice because he is a vegetarian; naturally, he is given opportunities to expound the virtues of this diet. However, the Pioneer Players was a company set up by suffragists to spread that message, and the play has a strong feminist content as well, though more subtle than the outright vegetarian propaganda.[38]

Josephine, the heroine, is forced to work in her father's butcher shop, which she confesses to a woman friend was "like living in a sort of nightmare. (Excitedly.) I shall never get used to it. Oh! the loathing!". Whenever she passed a butcher's she would imagine "how it would seem to anyone who came back to it from the future. . . what a shock it would give them to come suddenly upon such a blot of ugliness in the midst of beautiful things, – perhaps next door to a florist's – or a window full of books or pictures." [39]

Again, the play takes the argument beyond merely the physical unpleasantness of dealing with flesh foods to the acceptance by women of

such unpleasant duties imposed upon them by men, which in turn destroys their own sense of self. Josephine's mother, who "preaches submission", initially "suffered agonies" when she had to serve in the shop, and always loathed eating meat: "Poor mother! I don't believe for years she's ever done a single thing because she wanted to do it, but always because she ought, which generally means because father wished it. It's as if all the individuality has been crushed out of her." [40]

In a melodramatic scene Josephine is alone in the shop on a windy night, with the joints and carcasses swaying. According to the stage directions a pig starts to "sway back and forth in a sort of rhythmic motion":

As it sways its head comes fairly near to Josephine, who stares at it in horrible fascination, her eyes becoming fixed in terror. At last she can bear it no longer; rises slowly like one in a dream, keeping her eyes fixed on the pig as if under a spell, reaches out mechanically and takes down Freddy's apron, hanging on door, walks with it towards pig, holds it up to cover up the pig, when, just as she has raised her arms, holding the apron, still staring at pig, a horrible squeal is heard from slaughter-house of a dying pig, and with a piercing shriek Josephine falls fainting to the floor. [41]

This type of identification between women as victims and animals as victims often manifested itself in the anti-vivisection movement, [42] and it was also present in vegetarian feminists of the 1970s. [43] During the suffrage period it received its most eloquent expression by Lady Constance Lytton.

In *Prisons and Prisoners* she described a scene that occurred in 1908. While wandering through the town of Littlehampton she came upon a crowd of people "forming a ring round a sheep which had escaped as it was being taken to the slaughterhouse." The sheep was old and unsightly, and she had a vision of how it might have been on its native mountainside, "vigorous and independent". "With growing fear and distress", she wrote, "the sheep ran about more clumsily and became a source of amusement to the onlookers, who laughed and jeered at it." Finally it was caught, and one of the men, "resenting its struggles, gave it a great cuff in the face." Lady Constance was so outraged at this that she protested and managed to cause the man some shame. Seeing this sheep:

seemed to reveal to me for the first time the position of women throughout the world. I realised how often women are held in contempt as beings outside the pale of human dignity, excluded or confined, laughed at and insulted because of conditions in themselves for which they are not responsible, but which are due to fundamental injustices with regard to them, and to the mistakes of a civilisation in the shaping of which they have had no free share. [44]

In contrast to this emphasis on shared suffering and victimhood, some vegetarian feminists, keen to convert more women to both causes, stressed the ways in which vegetarianism could be empowering.

“There are very many women who wish they could do something to make the world a bit better, who long to have a mission, but whose home ties are too great and continuous to give them the liberty they think necessary”, said Margaret Cousins; “Now in the food reform cause they have a glorious mission field”. Not only that but “they only have the means at their disposal. No matter how convinced an average man may be that a vegetarian diet is best, unless he can persuade or order some woman. . . to prepare him these new dishes he is powerless to carry his views into effect, and to our shame be it said, that many, many men are saying that we are the stumbling-blocks in the cause, that if only the women would take the cooking up they would never touch flesh again.”[45] Her comments had much truth in them: in the late nineteenth century male members of the Vegetarian Society outnumbered female by four to one, and even in 1914 a solicitor cancelled his subscription to the Society’s journal because “I cannot induce my wife to adopt a Vegetarian diet”. [46]

The theme of empowerment was also taken up by a speaker at a suffrage meeting. She knew that “there are so many, whose hearts go out to the brave pioneers and leaders of our movement, whose souls are with them in their work, but whose duty lies essentially within the four walls of their home; and however much they may long to give a hand to those outside, feel that they have only very limited means of doing so.” But within the vegetarian movement a woman’s ability “to help the Suffrage Cause is practically unlimited. Vegetarianism aims so directly, as we women aim, at the abolition of the unregenerate doctrine of physical force.” Not only that, but “The Social evils which women are rebelling against, and hope ultimately to remedy through the power of the franchise would, in that community which is the ideal of the true vegetarian, cease to exist.”[47]

Another theme was that of ‘universal kinship’, and an eloquent speaker on this subject was Louise Lind-af-Hageby. Swedish by birth but a naturalised British subject, she was active in a number of campaigns and edited the *Anti-Vivisection Review*. In 1913 she fought a libel action in the High Court in the anti-vivisection cause, pleading her own case. At a vegetarian dinner held in her honour afterwards, the chairman (Colonel Sir Frederick Cardew) said that “The day that women get the vote will be the day on which the death-knell of vivisection will be sounded”. [48]

To Miss Lind-af-Hageby the discovery of evolution was crucial, for that “brought about the decay of the old anthropocentric idea of man. . . It taught that if there is this kinship physically between all living creatures, surely a responsibility rests upon us to see that these creatures, who have nerves as we have, who are made of the same flesh and blood as we are, who have minds differing from ours not in kind but in degree, should be

protected, as far as in our power lies, from ill-treatment, cruelty and abuse of every kind." She also saw "the movements for the greater freedom of women, for the enfranchisement of women, for their higher education, for the opening up of trades and professions for them, for the removal of the legal disabilities under which women suffer to-day as one of the practical efforts which are based on this realisation of solidarity and kinship." [49]

Miss Lind-af-Hageby was aware that there were fears at the time about the "feminisation of the world", which were "ultimately associated with the problem of the uprising of woman." But if men would come to rely less on violence and war to solve problems, and learn instead to use mind and reason, it would be "the greatest good that could possibly come to humanity", for "what is called effeminacy by some, but what is really greater spirituality is identical with the process of civilisation itself. ... The whole question is closely connected with the coming of women into social and political life, and I think we can say that the coming of woman is, in a sense, identical also with civilisation". [50]

It was the revaluation of the so-called 'feminine' qualities that attracted so many Edwardian feminists to Theosophy and other esoteric sects. [51] This worried at least one Vegetarian Society member who, in a series entitled 'The Best Methods of Vegetarian Propaganda', warned against "being too 'recherche' in our religion. . . If we mix up transmigration, theosophy and the 'wisdom of the East' with our vegetarian propaganda, I think we confuse and repel people." [52] This statement may have been true of many Vegetarian Society members – the impression on reading the journal is of a male-dominated, essentially conservative group concerned to demonstrate that their dietary choice was perfectly rational and not at all 'cranky' – but there is no evidence that Theosophy ever repelled any of the Edwardian feminists. When Brian Harrison asked Leonora Cohen why her mother had joined the Theosophical Society she replied, "Because it was broader minded. . . It was a different outlook." [53] Charlotte Despard summed up the connection in this way:

Related with Theosophy, the Women's Movement is related also with the other great movements of the world. . . The awakened instinct which feels the call of the sub-human, which says: – 'I am the voice of the voiceless. Through me the dumb shall speak,' is a modern phenomenon that cannot be denied. It works itself out as food reform on the one hand, and on the other, in strong protest against the cruel methods of experimental research. Both of these are in close unison with the demands being made by women. [54]

To Gifford Lewis, Charlotte Despard exemplified "a familiar clustering in the suffragist world of feminism, pacifism, vegetarianism and a working-class base," noting that in 1916 and 1917 she was "on the councils of: the Women's Freedom League, the Women's International League, the No-Conscription Fellowship, the National Campaign for Civil Liberties, the

Theosophical Society, the London Vegetarian Society, the Battersea Labour Party, the Women's Labour League, the Home Rule for India Committee and the Women's Peace Crusade.”[55]

We have seen that vegetarian suffragists came to their dietary choice from a variety of avenues, and only some would have subscribed to all of those ideals, but there was an ethos present in which the practical desire to alleviate the wrongs of society was linked with a non-patriarchal form of religion that offered the possibility of a new world outlook. This was particularly well put by Edward Carpenter, a homosexual who espoused socialism and a number of radical causes.[56] Speaking in Liverpool in 1910 on ‘The Larger Socialism’, he asked socialists to remember that:

side by side with the economic improvement and development of the country, there must be a moral and spiritual advance by the great body of people who composed our race. He therefore rejoiced to notice the success of several other contemporary movements, Vegetarianism, Theosophy, and the Women's Movement; although at the present time these movements, along with the Socialist movement, were only like small streams, be believed that sometime they would all converge and move as one great mighty river, which would sweep along for the purification and betterment of humanity.[57]

It was the belief that women, when they were able to influence political decisions by casting a vote, and otherwise fully participate in public life, would make the world kinder, more just, and more compassionate, that inspired so many to join the women's suffrage movement and work toward that goal. The vegetarian movement had the same overall goal, and therefore it is not surprising that so many suffragists should have adopted a vegetarian diet.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] Votes for Women 1 Oct 1908. Maud was a niece of the famous violinist, Joachim.

- [2] An exception is Julia Twigg (1982) *The Vegetarian Movement in England 1847-1981* (unpublished PhD thesis: London), pp. 172-5.
- [3] *The Vote*, Vol.1, p. 285; Vol.3, p. 180; Vol.7, p. 105. I am grateful to Elizabeth Crawford and Claire Eustance for these references.
- [4] From *The Star*, quoted in *The Vegetarian Messenger and Health Review* (hereafter VM&HR), Vol.14, p. 98 (May 1917).
- [5] Letters from Jean Petrie 30 July and 25 August 1996.
- [6] *The Humane Review*, Vol.8, p. 163 (1907-8). The thrust of the article was the dehumanising effect of the prison regime. I am grateful to Chris Olivant of the Vegetarian Society for bringing this journal to my attention. Margaret was the author of a pamphlet entitled *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Woman's Movement Today*, published in about 1910. I owe this information to Elizabeth Crawford, who is compiling *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide* (UCL Press, forthcoming).
- [7] VM&HR, Vol.4, (1907) p. 88.
- [8] B.M. Willmott Dobbie (1979) *A Nest of Suffragettes in Somerset (Batheaston)*, pp. 41, 46-7, 56.
- [9] A.J.R. ed (1913) *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* (London: Stanley Paul & Co), p. 343; Phoebe Hesketh (1966) *My Aunt Edith* (London: Peter Davis), pp. 82-5. I am grateful to Krista Cowman for this reference.
- [10] VM&HR, Vol.6 (1909), p. 118; Leah Leneman (1995) *A Guid Cause: the women's suffrage movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press), pp. 259 & 262.
- [11] Brian Harrison interview with Mrs Victoria Lidiard (née Simmons) 28 March 1976, Fawcett Library, London Guildhall University. Mrs Lidiard lived to be 102.
- [12] *The Suffrage Annual*, p. 210; VM&HR, Vol.14 (1917), pp. 54-5. Mrs Cohen also lived to be over 100.
- [13] Brian Harrison interview with Mrs Leonora Cohen 25 Oct 1974, Fawcett Library.
- [14] Constance Lytton (1914) *Prisons and Prisoners: some personal experiences* (London: William Heinemann), pp. 2, 74, 100, 243, 276-7.
- [15] Marij van Helmond (1992), *Votes for Women – the events on Merseyside 1870-1928* (National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside), p. 64. I am grateful to Marij van Helmond for advising me, in a letter of 17 January 1997, that Alice Ker was a vegetarian.
- [16] VM&HR, Vol.29 (1932), p. 258. Astonishingly, her biographer, Gifford Lewis (1988) *Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper: a biography* (London: Pandora), although well aware of Charlotte Despard's vegetarianism, seemed unaware that her own subject was also a vegetarian.
- [17] Sheila Peacock (1983) *Votes for Women: the women's fight in Portsmouth* (City of Portsmouth), p. 8.
- [18] The information about Ada Nield Chew's vegetarianism comes from the written summary of Brian Harrison's interview with Ada Nield Chew's daughter, Doris at

the Fawcett Library; unfortunately, at the time of researching this paper the tape itself was not available for listening to.

- [19] June Hannan (1989) *Isabella Ford* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 13. Her whole family were anti-vivisectionists, and Isabella was also chair of the Leeds branch of the RSPCA. Letter from June Hannan 25 November 1996.
- [20] Arncliffe-Sennett Collection, Reel 4, British Library. I am grateful to Elizabeth Crawford for this reference. The vegetarian menu comprised: 'Hors d'oeuvres – Consommé Paysanne, Crème St Germain – Croquettes d'Ouefs Sauce Tomate – Mignottes des Noix Sauce aux Pommes, Pommes Purée – Choux de Bruxelles Sauté – Macaroni au Gratin – Poire au Riz Meringué – Bombe Cardinale, Gaufrettes – Dessert.'
- [21] Miss Dorothea Rock and Mrs Nourse are the two certain WSPU members. A 'Mrs Clarkson Swann', who is listed amongst the vegetarian guests cannot be traced, but a Mrs Cameron Swann was a WSPU member; nothing is known of a Mrs Bowker or Mrs E. Lowy who are listed, but the prefixes could have been wrong, as Miss Dorothy Bowker and Miss Ethel Lowy were WSPU members. I owe the information on those women to Elizabeth Crawford. Information on the others comes from *The Suffrage Annual*, pp. 42, 175, 240, 257, 365, 393. Mary Hare was honorary secretary of Brighton & Hove branch WFL and also active in the Church League for Women's Suffrage. Emily White, the other WFL member, spent twenty years working in Calcutta as a missionary. (There are five other 'Miss Whites' listed, but none of them noted their 'club' as the International Women's Franchise.) Dr Clara Fitten was vice-president of Streatham, Clapham & Wandsworth Branch of the CUWFA. The other CUWFA member was Mrs A.M.W. Stirling, who was also active in the New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage.
- [22] According to her sister, Constance Lytton adopted the diet, 'which she had always preferred', in 1902. *Letters of Constance Lytton (1925)* selected and arranged by Betty Balfour (London: William Heinemann), p. 113; Brian Harrison interviews with Leonora Cohen and Victoria Lidiard.
- [23] *Lytton, Prisons and Prisoners*, p. 2. Her sister wrote that 'In consequence of her increasing rheumatic tendency she adopted a vegetarian diet, which she had always preferred, and which Aunt T. had for long recommended. It apparently to a great degree cured her rheumatism, but her heart remained permanently affected.' *Letters to Constance Lytton*, p. 113.
- [24] Transcript of interview by Mike Storm with Leonora Cohen 1 September 1975, Vegetarian Society archive; Brian Harrison interview with Leonora Cohen.
- [25] *VM&HR*, Vol.12, (1915), p. 13.
- [26] *Shafts* is available at the Fawcett Library.
- [27] Arncliffe-Sennett Collection, Reel 4, British Library. Below a similar ad she wrote: 'Women clothing themselves in cloaks costing £575 which can only last a year or two and represents frightful and un-necessary slaughter! I do begin to feel the world is a hateful place. It seems so hopeless to rouse people. Ninety guineas and hundreds of young animals slaughtered to throw something round a

- woman's shoulders (see ermine stole) not to keep her warm – but to make her look pretty!
- [28] Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell (1994) *Theatre and Fashion – Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 180.
- [29] *Votes for Women*, Vol.2, (1909), pp. 352, 377, 425. There was no response from the organisers of the stall.
- [30] See Mary Ann Elston (1987) *Women and Anti-vivisection in Victorian England, 1870-1900* in Nicholas A. Rupke ed., *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (London: Croom Helm), pp. 259-94; Hilda Kean (1995) *The 'Smooth Cool Men of Science': the feminist and socialist response to vivisection*, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol.40, pp. 16-38; Coral Lansbury (1985) *The Old Brown Dog – women, workers and vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press). Lansbury states that medical students linked anti-vivisectionists with suffragettes, but that theme is not further explored in her book.
- [31] Quoted in Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, p. 128.
- [32] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- [33] Diana Burfield (1983) *Theosophy and Feminism: some explorations in nineteenth-century biography* in Pat Holden ed., *Women's Religious Experience: cross cultural perspectives* (London & Canberra: Croom Helm), pp. 35-6.
- [34] *VM&HR*, Vol.12 (1915) p. 194. Mrs Cousins was one of those who contributed to the WSPU's 'murderous millinery' correspondence, *Votes for Women*, Vol.2 (1915), p. 377. In 1915 she and her husband, James, went to India, where she was active in theosophical circles. See Catherine Candy, 'Relating feminisms, nationalism and imperialisms: Ireland, India and Margaret Cousins's sexual politics' in *Women's History Review*, Vol.3 No.4 (1994), Special Issue *Feminism, Imperialism and Race: a dialogue between Indian and Britain*, edited by Barbara N. Ramusack & Antoinette Burton.
- [35] *VM&HR*, vol.4 (1907), pp. 295-6.
- [36] *VM&HR*, Vol.10 (1913), p. 308.
- [37] *VM&HR*, Vol.4 (1907), p. 296.
- [38] I am grateful to Katharine Cockin for bringing this play to my attention. For the company see Katharine Cockin (1994) *The Pioneer Players (1911-25): a cultural history* (unpublished PhD thesis: Leicester).
- [39] Florence Edgar Hobson (1912) *A Modern Crusader* (London), pp. 8-9.
- [40] *Ibid.*, pp. 9 & 50.
- [41] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
- [42] Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, p. 128.
- [43] Twigg, 'The Vegetarian Movement in England', p. 332.
- [44] Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners*, pp. 12-14. She continued: 'I was ashamed to remember that although my sympathy had been spontaneous with regard to the wrongs of animals, of children, of men and women who belonged to

down-trodden races or classes of society, yet that hitherto I had been blind to the sufferings peculiar to women as such, which are endured by women of every class, every race, every nationality’.

[45] VM&HR, Vol.4 (1907), pp. 296-7.

[46] Twigg, ‘The Vegetarian Movement in England’, p. 171; VM&HR, Vol.11 (1914), p. 147.

[47] VM&HR, Vol.9 (1912), p. 345. The extract from the paper is signed ‘W.D.’ Could this have been Marion Wallace Dunlop? One can only speculate.

[48] VM&HR, Vol.10 (1913), pp. 274-5.

[49] VM&HR, Vol.11 (1914), pp. 157-8. The reporter from the Daily Mail, who went to hear her speak under the auspices of the Glasgow Vegetarian Society, expected to see ‘someone square jawed, high browed, slightly angular, and severely and intellectually frugal looking’ but ‘here instead was a pretty, little, plump woman, with kind brown eyes, eyes that twinkle. . . She was not even dowdy and undecorative. Her blue dress was. . . pretty as anyone could wish’. The reporter was ‘almost converted to vegetarianism’ by her use of ‘straight, hard logic.’ Ibid., p. 163.

[50] Ibid., pp. 158-9.

[51] Twigg, ‘The Vegetarian Movement in England’, p. 174. Leonora Cohen’s mother joined the Theosophical Society when Leonora was a child; Mrs Cohen remained a Theosophist until her death. Victoria Lidiard’s mother was converted to vegetarianism by the Rev Todd Ferrier, founder of the Order of the Cross, a sect to which many leading members of the Vegetarian Society belonged during this century. (Brian Harrison interview with Victoria Lidiard, and my personal knowledge of the Order of the Cross.) Edith Rigby was inspired by Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy. Hesketh, My Aunt Edith, p. 86.

[52] VM&HR, Vol.9 (1912), p. 46. She went on: ‘After all, we are mainly vegetarians because we love our fellow creatures and can’t bring ourselves to kill them. This is simple and will fit in with any religion.’ Ironically, the writer, Miss Alice M. Bonus, was a niece of Anna Kingsford, who founded the Hermetic Society in the 1880s after falling out with the Theosophical Society.

[53] Brian Harrison interview with Leonora Cohen. But she did say that she found plenty of resistance to militancy within the Leeds Theosophical Society, though not from Annie Besant, who understood the need.

[54] Charlotte Despard (1913) *Theosophy and the Women’s Movement* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society) p. 44.

[55] Lewis, Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper, p. 169. Gertrude Colmore, who wrote a ‘Life’ of Emily Wilding Davison, was also an animal rights activist, a Theosophist, and a pacifist. L. Stanley with A. Morley, *The life and death of Emily Wilding Davison* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), pp. 98 and 107. The authors comment (p. 126) that a ‘concern for animal rights was also shared by Emily Davison’ but do not explore this further. Vegetarianism is not mentioned.

- [56] Colin Spencer (1994) *The Heretic's Feast – a history of vegetarianism* (London: Fourth Estate), pp. 284-5 & 294. Spencer argues that vegetarians were 'firmly outsiders and would remain so', a debateable statement.
- [57] VM&HR, Vol.7 (1910), p. 167.

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