

A VINDICATION OF NATURAL DIET

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A vindication of natural diet by Percy Bysshe Shelley

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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

**A VINDICATION
OF NATURAL DIET**

A
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OF
NATURAL DIET.

BY
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

A NEW EDITION.

"Our simple life wants little, and true taste
Hires not the pale drudge LUXURY to waste
The scene it would adorn, and therefore still
Nature, with all her children, haunts the hill"
Egyptusdidion.

LONDON: F. PITMAN, 20, PATERNOSTER ROW.
MANCHESTER: JOHN HEYWOOD, RIDGEFIELD; AND OFFICES
OF THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY, 75, PRINCESS STREET.
1884.

PREFATORY NOTICE.

SHELLEY'S "Vindication of Natural Diet" was first written as part of the notes to "Queen Mab," which was privately issued in 1813. Later in the same year the "Vindication" was separately published as a pamphlet, and it is from this later publication that the present reprint is made. The original pamphlet is now exceedingly scarce, but it is said to have been reprinted in 1835, as an appendix to an American medical work, the "Manual on Health," by Dr. Turnbull, of New York. Two copies only are known to have been preserved of this excessively rare pamphlet, though possibly others may be hidden in unfrequented libraries and out of the way country houses. One copy is in the British Museum, and the other is in the possession of Mr. H. Buxton Forman, who has reprinted it in his great edition of Shelley, where it forms the opening part of the second volume of the "Prose Works."

The main object of Shelley's pamphlet was to show that a vegetable diet is the most *natural*, and therefore the best for mankind. It is not an appeal to humanitarian sentiment, but an argument based on individual experience, concerning the intimate connection of health and morality with food. It has no claim to originality in the arguments adduced; its materials being avowedly drawn from the works of Dr. Lambe and Mr. Newton, of whom an account may be read in Mr. Howard Williams' "Catena," but the style is Shelley's own, and the pamphlet is in many ways one of the most interesting and characteristic of his prose works.

PREFATORY NOTICE.

Perhaps its most remarkable feature is to be found in the very pertinent remarks as to the bearing of Vegetarianism on those questions of economy and social reform, which are now forcing themselves more and more on the attention of the English people.*

At the time of writing his "Vindication of Natural Diet," Shelley had himself, for some months past, adopted a Vegetarian diet, chiefly, no doubt, through his intimacy with the Newton family. There seems no reason to doubt that he continued to practise Vegetarianism during the rest of his stay in England, that is from 1813 to the spring of 1818. Leigh Hunt's account of his life at Marlow, in 1817, is as follows:—"This was the round of his daily life. He was up early, breakfasted sparingly, wrote this 'Revolt of Islam' all the morning; went out in his boat, or in the woods, with some Greek author or the Bible in his hands; came home to a dinner of vegetables (for he took neither meat nor wine); visited, if necessary, the sick and fatherless, whom others gave Bibles to and no help; wrote or studied again, or read to his wife and friends the whole evening; took a crust of bread or a glass of whey for his supper, and went early to bed."

In 1818, he left England for Italy, and during his last four years, the most dreamy and speculative period of his life, he seems to have been less strict in his observance of Vegetarian practice. It is not true however, as has sometimes been asserted, that Shelley lost faith in the principles of Vegetarianism; for his change in diet was owing partly to his well-known carelessness about his food, which became more marked at this time, and partly to a desire to avoid

* Shelley's pamphlet appeared in 1813. The Vegetarian Society was not founded until 1847. Information as to this Society, with list of its publications, can be had free on application to the Secretary, 75, Princess Street, Manchester.

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giving trouble to the other members of his household, which, as we see from a line in his letter to Maria Gisborne, written in 1820, "Though we eat little flesh and drink no wine" was not entirely a Vegetarian one. Yet, even at this period of his life, he himself was practically, if not systematically, a Vegetarian, for all his biographers agree in informing us that bread was literally his "staff of life." We cannot doubt that if he had lived in the present time he would have taken a leading part in the movement towards Food Reform. As it is, he has left us an invaluable legacy in his "Vindication of Natural Diet," perhaps the most powerful and eloquent plea ever put forward in favour of the Vegetarian cause.

He found in this the presage of his ideal future. To his enthusiastic faith in the transforming effect of the Vegetarian principle, we owe some of the finest passages in his poetry. In the close of the eighth canto of "Queen Mab," we have a picture of a time when man no more

Slays the lamb that looks him in the face.

It is the same ideal of bloodless innocence as that of Israel's prophet-poet, who declares that in the Holy Mountain they shall not hurt nor destroy. Never did sage or singer, prophet or priest, or poet, see a brighter vision of the future than that which is imaged in the description of a glorified earth, from which cruelty, bloodshed, and tyranny, have been banished.

" My brethren, we are free ! The fruits are glowing
Beneath the stars, and the night-winds are flowing
O'er the ripe corn. The birds and beasts are dreaming.
Never again may blood of bird or beast
Stain with its venomous stream a human feast,

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To the pure skies in accusation steaming ;
Avenging poisons shall have ceased
To feed disease and fear and madness ;
The dwellers of the earth and air
Shall throng around our steps in gladness,
Seeking their food or refuge there.
Our toil from thought all glorious forms shall cull,
To make this earth, our home, more beautiful ;
And Science, and her sister Poesy,
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free !"

Over the plain the throngs were scattered then
In groups around the fires, which from the sea
Even to the gorge of the first mountain-glen
Blazed wide and far. The banquet of the free
Was spread beneath many a dark cypress-tree ;
Beneath whose spires which swayed in the red flame
Reclining as they ate, of liberty,
And hope, and justice, and Laone's name,
Earth's children did a woof of happy converse frame.

Their feast was such as Earth, the general mother,
Pours from her fairest bosom, when she smiles
In the embrace of Autumn. To each other
As when some parent fondly reconciles
Her warring children, she their wrath beguiles
With her own sustenance ; they relenting weep :—
Such was this festival, which, from their isles
And continents and winds and oceans deep,
All shapes might throng to share that fly or creep.

That this was no mere poetic sentiment is proved by this pamphlet, which is an earnest vindication of Vegetarianism.

H. S. S.
W. E. A. A.

[ORIGINAL TITLE PAGE.]

A

VINDICATION
OF
NATURAL DIET.

BEING ONE IN A SERIES OF NOTES TO QUEEN MAB
(A PHILOSOPHICAL FORM).

*Ιαπετιονίδη, πάντων περι μῆδεα εἶδω,
Χαίρεισ πυρ κλεψας, και εμασ φρενας ηπεροτευσασ;
Σοι' αυτω μεγα κτημα και ανδρασιν εσσομενοισι.
Τοισδ' εγω αντι πυροσ δωσω κακον, ω κεν απαντες
Τερπωνται κατα θυμον, εον κακον αμφαγαπωντες.*

ΗΣΙΩΔ. Op. et Dica. 1, 54.

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1813.

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