

Cranks, Clerks, and Suffragettes: The Vegetarian Restaurant in British Culture and Fiction 1880–1914

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Scene—"The Nebuchadnezzar's Head," in the City. Time—The luncheon hour. The interior, which is bright, and tastefully arranged, is crowded with the graminivorous of both sexes. Clerks of a literary turn devour "The Fortnightly" and porridge alternately or discuss the comparative merits of modern writers. Lady-clerks lunch sumptuously and economically on tea and baked ginger-pudding. Trim Waitresses move about with a sweet but slightly mystic benignity, as if conscious of conducting a dietetic mission to the dyspeptic.¹

—Francis Cowley Burnand, "At a Vegetarian Restaurant"

Appearing in an 1892 issue of *Punch*, "The Nebuchadnezzar's Head" was the invention of the magazine's editor, Francis Cowley Burnand, who recognized the vegetarian restaurant as a source of rich comic potential. Moving from table to table, he introduces a cast of eccentric customers: an ardent fiancé initiating his betrothed into the "mysteries" of the flesh-free meal, three clerks debating the respective virtues of Browning, Swinburne, and Whitman, and a pair of "red-faced" country folk confused by the offense caused by their order of well-done chops and two pints of bitter. On the menu are items such as "Flageolet Fritters" and "Cinghalese Stew"—an unexpected pairing of "curried bananas and chicory"—that can be washed down with non-alcoholic specialities like "Spruce Sprout" and "Anti-Bass Beer."² To readers horrified at the prospect of "rice and prunes" for lunch, Burnand's sketch was part of a long-running satire on the absurdities of the meatless diet and its earnest enthusiasts.³ Following the inauguration of the Vegetarian Society in 1847 by an alliance of utopian socialists and religious dissenters, the

eccentric flesh-avoider became a stock character of Victorian popular culture. The meat-free cause was embraced as part of a broader progressive scene that included advocates of temperance and labor rights, anti-vivisectionists, spiritualists, pacifists, and Fabians. The diet was understood as an alimentary expression of radical affiliations and its adherents were widely mocked for their unconventional beliefs. The rise of the vegetarian restaurant through the 1880s and 1890s marked a new frontier for the movement. Writing in 1874, Howard Williams urged his fellow reformers to acknowledge the power of the “eating house” as a “permanent advertisement” for their cause: more effective than proselytizing on the virtue of beans over bacon, they could evangelize on the basis of wholesome “pies” and tempting “savories” available at a reasonable price.⁴ Beyond propaganda, vegetarian restaurants were also—as “The Nebuchadnezzar’s Head” illustrates—fictional spaces, elements of a broader urban imaginary and discursive sites in which the complex politics of consumption were negotiated.

Vegetarianism was big business in late Victorian Britain and nowhere was this more apparent than in the growing number of meat-free eateries. Most of these were located in London, numbering around thirty by 1890, but similar establishments could also be found in Birmingham, Glasgow, and Manchester. A dedicated magazine, the *Weekly Star and Vegetarian Restaurant Gazette*, reported on the industry and in 1889 a London Vegetarian Restaurants Association Ltd was established to allow investors to buy shares in meat-free businesses.⁵ In *Fifty Years of Food Reform: A History of the Vegetarian Movement in England* (1898), Charles W. Forward mapped the location of thirteen of the most popular restaurants in London (fig. 1). Clustered around Farringdon, Cheapside, and Soho, with names that evoked the natural world like The Apple Tree and The Garden, they held out the promise of a wholesome meal in the heart of the bustling metropolis. These were key sites for organizing—most rented out rooms for meetings, some hosted social clubs, and others stocked periodicals like the *Vegetarian Messenger*—but they also catered to a wide range of the city’s inhabitants. Reflecting on their success, Forward noted that they had begun to attract not only dedicated meat-avoiders, but also the custom of “people who are not vegetarians in principle” who had been encouraged to “make a trial of the diet” by the “cleanliness” and “good cooking” on offer.⁶ Some offered affordable lunchtime fare to London’s growing army of white-collar workers, while others like the “artistically decorated” St George’s House Café appealed to a higher class of customer and counted celebrities like George Bernard Shaw



Figure 1. Charles Forward, "Map of London Showing Vegetarian Restaurants," in *Fifty Years of Food Reform: A History of the Vegetarian Movement in England* (London: The Ideal Publishing Union, 1898), 102.

and Fanny Brough as regulars.⁷ Whatever their clientele, they promoted themselves primarily on the basis of good nutrition and simple fare. Contributing to a wider health reform movement, evident elsewhere in the rise of dietetics and a growth of physical culture, the meat-free meal was sold as a necessary aid to bodily efficiency and mental vitality.

Though they remained something of a novelty, over the closing decades of the nineteenth century vegetarian restaurants became part of the everyday life of city; this development is reflected in fictional representations of meat-free dining. As a literary trope, vegetarianism was most often put to work in fantasy novels or works of science fiction, where it contributed to utopian visions of new moral, political and social orders. From Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) and W. H. Hudson's *The Crystal Age* (1887) to H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), the fleshless diet proved an effective means to amplify the alterity of uncharted regions. In contrast, when vegetarian restaurants appeared in realistic fiction of the period, their existence was not fantastical or speculative but ordinary.

Walking through Saxe Coburg Square in “The Red-headed League” (1891), for instance, Sherlock Holmes lists “the Vegetarian Restaurant” along with “Mortimer’s, the tobacconist,” “the little newspaper-shop,” and “McFarlane’s carriage-building depot” as he constructs an image of the surrounding streets.⁸ In *The London Restaurant 1840–1918* (2018), Brenda Assael notes that the “quotidian nature of taking a meal in public” has so far obscured the “significance of the restaurant as a critical component in the creation of modern metropolitan culture.”⁹ This is certainly true of the vegetarian restaurant, which has been largely overlooked by historians. Exceptions include Assael, who includes meat-free establishments in her study of dining in the capital, and James Gregory’s *Of Victorians and Vegetarians* (2007), which situates them within a broader discussion of the movement. Building on the work of these historians, this article draws on fictional representations, newspaper articles, advertisements, and dietary reform literature to map meat-free dining back on to the cultural imaginaries of London. Structured around three customers—the health enthusiast, the office worker, and the suffragette—it seeks to understand who frequented these establishments and why. Taking the satirical “Nebuchadnezzar’s Head” seriously, this article examines the vegetarian restaurant as a space in which the intersections between consumption and gender, health and work, were made visible.

Health Reformers

In E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910), Margaret Schlegel—youthful, liberal and intellectual—suggests to the conservative Henry Wilcox that the next time he is in London he ought to join her for lunch at a vegetarian restaurant, referred to simply as “Mr Eustace Miles’s.” He assents to the proposed arrangement, but she quickly has second thoughts: “‘No, you’d hate it,’ she said, ‘it’s all proteids and body-building, and people coming up to you and beg pardon, but you have such a beautiful aura.’”¹⁰ Coming not long before the start of their marriage, Margaret’s sudden discomfort at the idea of dining with her rather stuffy love interest in such an eclectic environment goes some way toward demonstrating the generational and cultural gulf between the two characters. He, conventional and chauvinistic, is a remnant of the Victorian era just slipping from view, while she is a creature of coming modernity: bright, idealistic, and more than happy to forgo meat and lunch on nut cutlets instead. Forster offers

no further description of the restaurant in question, but many of his readers would have clocked the reference being made to one of the city's better-known meat-free establishments. Located at the western end of Covent Garden and spread over two floors, the Eustace Miles Restaurant boasted, in addition to several airy dining rooms, a cookery school, publishing house, and advice bureau. Serving over 1500 meals a day and hosting exercise classes, reading groups, weekly lectures, and political meetings, it became a center of hygienic and dietary reform in the capital. The restaurant's popularity was due, in part, to its celebrity owner. A champion tennis player and Olympic medalist, Eustace Hamilton Miles made his name as an outspoken champion of physical exercise, mental discipline, and the so-called "Simpler Foods."¹¹ Through the opening decades of the twentieth century Miles and his wife Hallie built a health food empire that included a line of self-help books, a country retreat, a range of branded protein products, and a monthly magazine, the *Healthward Ho!*. Hailed in 1907 as the "Nut King, the Bean Emperor and the Milk Kahn," Miles was the most famous vegetarian in Edwardian London.¹²

He may not have endorsed this description, despite advocating for a meatless diet, as Miles was keen to distance himself from the vegetarian movement. Writing in *Failures of Vegetarianism* (1902), he chastised earlier reformers for allowing the "diet of vegetables" to become associated with "anaemic and peevish faddists" and proposed that the term "Simpler Foods" be taken up instead.¹³ In order to distinguish himself from the "cranks and bewhiskered gentlemen" of the Vegetarian Society, Miles recommended abstinence from flesh as a route to better health, rather than as an expression of religious belief or moral conviction.¹⁴ Alongside figures like Arnold Frank Hills, a millionaire businessman and sports enthusiast who set up the London Vegetarian Society in 1888, Miles pioneered a kind of muscular vegetarianism that was framed by the language of physical culture and nutritional science. A well-known sports personality, he was well placed to comment on the "body building power" of vegetables and used his own sporting victories as proof of the efficacy of his dietary advice to claim he had won tennis matches fortified by only salad, Hovis bread, and a very weak cup of tea.¹⁵ Wholesome, natural, and moderate, the flesh-free diet was, he insisted, the best way to fuel the active body because vegetables and grains could be processed quickly into the energy, while meat tended to overload and clog the digestive system. In exercise books like *The Eustace Miles System of Physical Culture* (1907) and *Fitness for Play and Work* (1912), Miles encouraged readers

to adopt a regimented program of physical activity, supported by a carefully calibrated diet. The Eustace Miles Restaurant had, according to one review, the “suggestion of the gymnasium” in its high ceilings and polished wooden floors, and its proprietors were keen to capitalize on this association.¹⁶ Adverts for the restaurant placed emphasis on suitability of its “well-balanced non-flesh meals” for the “Athlete” in training and exercise classes were held in one of its upstairs rooms.¹⁷ Promoted as a “restaurant with ideals,” it adopted a uniquely didactic approach to dining. Menu items were organized according to their nutritional value—N. for nourishing, N.N. for very nourishing, and F.U. for “free from uric acid”; a stock of improving literature was available to buy from the front desk; and customers were encouraged to attend weekly lectures on food reform.¹⁸

Patrons who were uncertain how to begin transforming their diet for the better could begin by purchasing the product advertised on the back of their menu. Combining his initials with an allusion to protein, in 1910 Miles developed a special preparation called Emprote and began marketing it as a training tool for “cyclists, athletes and swimmers” (fig. 2). Promising the consumer “extra staying power and energy,” Emprote was a preparation of dried milk and cereal with some mysterious added proteins that could be consumed as a drink or eaten in EM Bars and EM Bread. It entered a burgeoning market for food bases and extracts, which saw Cadbury’s Cocoa, Marmite, and Bovril sold as miraculous health-giving products. Meat substitutes were also popular and vegetarian restaurants offered a dazzling array of patented alternatives. Wondering at the meteoric rise of the Eustace Miles Restaurant, a 1907 article in *The Bystander* marveled that soon “mock ham, imitation salmon, protose cutlets and proteid ice-pudding will be our new “Roast Beef of Old England.”¹⁹ In his review for the *Gourmet’s Guide to London* (1914), Nathaniel Newnham-Davies, the famous food critic and *Pall Mall Gazette* columnist, recalled that his meal at the Eustace Miles Restaurant began with “two little angles of hot toast” spread with “Compacto,” a paste that possessed “a far-off taste of potted meat.”²⁰ Beyond simply resembling meat, preparations like Compacto claimed to be more nutritious, easier to assimilate, and less corrupted than animal flesh. In an advertisement for Nuttoria the “savoury nut meat,” for instance, the customer is assured of its “purity,” digestibility, and suitability for periods of “prolonged muscular exercise” (fig. 3). The idea that meat might be better derived from nuts led G. K. Chesterton, in a 1909 essay, to rail against the muddling of comestible categories: “I will,” he wrote, “eat nuts with

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Figure 2. "Emprote as a Training Diet." In *Milestone 10 Mistakes Most People Make* by Eustace Miles (Norwich, UK: London and Norwich Press, 1920): 40.

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Figure 3. "Nuttoria Savoury Nut Meat." In *Comprehensive Guide-Book to Natural Hygienic and Humane Diet* by Sidney H. Beard (Paignton, UK: Order of the Golden Age, 1906): 34.

any man—or with any monkey. But they must be nuts—not nutton, or nutter, or nusco, or nutrogen, or nuttolene, or nuttose, or nutarian Cashew.”²¹ Chesterton’s frustration at the indignity of the nut forced to masquerade as a miraculous vegetarian food reflects the contradictory claims made by products like Emprote and Nuttoria, which were industrially produced but sold as wholesome, unprocessed, and derived from nature.

In keeping with the “body-building dishes” that Henry Wilcox is threatened with in *Howards End*, fictional depictions of fleshless dining often light upon the counterfeit nature of the food on offer.²² Arthur Machen’s story “The Bowmen” (1914), for instance, features a “queer vegetarian restaurant in London” serving “eccentric dishes of cutlets made of lentils or nuts that pretended to be steak”; H. G. Wells’s *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story* (1909), includes a discussion of a “new substitute for dripping” which exercises an “exceptionally purifying influence on the mind”; and “vegetarian ‘basis’” also feature in Wells’s *The Passionate Friends* (1913).²³ In George Gissing’s semi-autobiographical *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), the narrator recalls his youthful enthusiasm for the meat-free cause, but bemoans the time he wasted on “savoury cutlets” and “vegetable steaks.” Such dishes are, he has since realized, little more than “pretentious cheats of the appetite” sold on the basis of spurious “chemical analysis” and “tabulated humbugs.”²⁴ Bad enough that “haricots” would pretend to be “sausage,” without the former having the audacity to claim nutritional superiority over the latter.²⁵ This depiction of vegetarian foods as poor replicas of meat dishes raises questions regarding the representation and negotiation of authenticity in relation to consumption. Elizabeth Outka, in her study of the relationship between modernism and consumerism in the early twentieth century, coined the term “commodified authentic” to describe the paradox of a consumer culture advertised as free from commercial taint.²⁶ Along similar lines, the Edwardian market for health food—vegetarian restaurants, self-help literature, and wonder products like Emprote—was established on the basis that a simpler life, removed from the dulling effects of industrial capitalism, could be purchased. According to Assael, establishments like the Eustace Miles Restaurant successfully aligned “prescriptive moralizing” with “commercial opportunity,” so that meatless dining could be sold as both health-giving and conscience-easing.²⁷ However, as is suggested by Gissing’s skeptical narrator and Wells’s wry disdain for miraculous food bases, not everyone bought into the vision of wellbeing sold by reformers like Miles.

Clerks

In the *Gourmet's Guide to London* Newnham-Davies, having placed an order of "lettuce and sorrel soup" followed by "asparagus and lentil timbale," looks around the large dining room of the Eustace Miles Restaurant and observes that "the people at the tables are just like the people one sees at any other restaurant where the prices are not high—ladies who might be stenographers, or country cousins up for a day's shopping, young men who, I daresay, are bank clerks—a good, level, healthy looking gathering."²⁸ In common with the fictional "Nebuchadnezzar's Head," this clientele appears to have been composed mainly of white-collar workers in search of a fast and affordable meal. Situated in London's commercial center, vegetarian restaurants had some success in luring workers away from street stalls, cafes, and chop houses. As Gregory has uncovered: "the 'Alpha' restaurant was mainly patronised by Crosse and Blackwell's clerical staff [and] the 'Ceres' near St Paul's [was used] by people working at the nearby warehouses, publishers' offices and businesses."²⁹ These establishments offered special menus and deals to encourage this custom, but the link between office work and vegetarianism went beyond the question of where to eat lunch.

Beginning in the 1880s, restaurant proprietors and vegetarian advocates foregrounded the specific health benefits that meat-free dining held for those employed in sedentary occupations. Publications like *The Dietetic Reformer* and *The Herald of Health* featured editorials warning of the deleterious effects of flesh eating on the health of the brain worker and published articles celebrating the transformative power of legumes on productivity. They also ran letters that boasted of conversion and redemption. Writing to *The Vegetarian* a "City Clerk" reported that as "a flesh and white bread eater" he had been "afflicted with that great evil, constipation, accompanied by depression," but that these ailments had disappeared with a change of diet.³⁰ Along similar lines, advertisements often pointed to the advantages of lighter fare for the busy worker. An 1886 advert for the Eastward Ho! on Leadenhall Street, for example, promised a meal that was not only "nourishing" but also "easily digested" and thus free from the "dull, drowsy sensations which generally ensue after partaking of animal food."³¹ The success of this marketing strategy was derived from a broad consensus concerning the rise of digestive distress in white-collar occupations. Starting in the early part of the century, when prominent physicians like John Ayrton Paris warned that dyspepsia was fast becoming a

“City Disease” exacerbated by “commercial excitement” and “competition,” gastric ill health was increasingly perceived as the preserve of the desk worker.³² Forced to dine on commercially produced meals, quickly and at strange hours of the day, the urban worker’s harassed stomach became a site of medical intercession and cultural fascination.

The triangulation of work, mental strain, and indigestion fueled factual and fictional depictions of working life in the capital. In Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891), a novel occupied with the perils of working life, the thwarted professional ambitions of its characters are expressed most clearly in their various gastric complaints. Described as “martyrs to dyspepsia,” Gissing’s hack journalists and failed writers find themselves frequently without appetite and plagued by debilitating bouts of nausea; the results, we are told, of “toiling” unsuccessfully in an increasingly competitive marketplace.³³ Conjoining the alimentary and the environmental, digestive distress in *New Grub Street* is not only a physical response to poor diet, but also a mental state shaped by the increasingly precarious nature of modern employment. A committed chronicler of lower middle-class life, in novels like *Eve’s Ransom* (1895) and *The Town Traveller* (1898) Gissing dramatized the experiences, interests, and concerns of a growing demographic of white-collar workers.

Between 1881 and 1914 the number of people employed in London offices increased dramatically, from 80,109 to 140,847 men and from 3,101 to 39,847 women.³⁴ Reflecting on the rapid increase in government, bank, law, and insurance clerks, Michael Heller has argued that the development of the capital—with regard to infrastructure and commerce, but also in terms of culture and politics—was dictated by the needs of this growing army of desk workers.³⁵ Suburbs cropped up around the edges of the city spawning networks of rail, trams, and underground trains. While in town, new entertainments—department stores, skating rinks, teahouses, sports clubs, and parks—flourished on the small disposable income now afforded to the average lower middle-class family.

The intimacy of the urban environment transformed not only the city, but also the working body. The cast of sickly writers in *New Grub Street*, beset by gastric complaints and frayed nerves, were drawn from cultural representations of the unhealthy desk dweller made ill by the pressures of the modern workplace, where stagnating wages and job insecurity, coupled with an influx of female workers, threatened to lower the status of the clerking profession. Though there is little consensus among historians regarding the severity of this crisis, with some seeking to complicate any straightforward story of decline, popular depictions

from the period tended to present the working life of the clerk as financially strained and monotonous.³⁶ The meat-free meal was bound up in this narrative. Vegetarianism in Gissing's novels, for instance, is nearly always a sign of poverty, a marker of genteel deprivation and barely concealed desperation. In one of his short stories published in the *Idler* in 1896, two clerks, "of means as slender as their persons" and "alike in the fervour of their devotion to abstinent ideals," sit down to a daily dinner of "unpalatable" dishes in a popular meat-free eatery.³⁷ Likewise, the vegetarian restaurant appearing in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is frequented by "poor clerks and shop-boys, bloodless girls and women of many sorts" who are lured in by the promise of a six-penny lunch of "lentil soup and haricot something-or-other." It was, the narrator insists, a "grotesquely heart-breaking sight" to observe the hard-up diners "endeavouring to find relish" in such a miserable meal.³⁸ Along similar lines, vegetarianism in Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) amounts to little more than an ethical pose adopted by the destitute Madden sisters to obscure the extreme privation they are forced to labor under. Near the beginning of the novel, Virginia negotiates a cheap weekly rate with her landlady Mrs. Conisbee on the basis that she is a vegetarian who takes meals that are "so very simple" and involving only a "kettle and a saucepan," that she may "just as well prepare them" in her own room.³⁹ Later she is persuaded to eat a little meat at the home of Rhoda Nunn, a family friend and bluestocking who runs a secretarial college. Though she "first refused the offer of meat," Virginia eventually admits that "months of miserable eating and drinking in her stuffy bedroom made an invitation such as this a veritable delight to her."⁴⁰ Meat-free eating was, for Gissing, a symptom of scarcity, a blight on the nation's health, and a damning indictment of an increasingly cutthroat society.

This portrayal is complicated, however, by the fact that vegetarian restaurants were not especially cheap places to eat. Many marketed themselves on the basis of affordability—an advertisement for the Alpha on Oxford Street boasted that its "9 d. Tea" was "a marvel of cheapness" and the National Food Reform Association promised "cheap dinners for the poor at a cost of less than 3d per head"—but cost remained a recurrent point of contention between reformers and their critics.⁴¹ Though it was broadly assumed that vegetarian meals should cost less than those featuring meat, in practice more economical fare could often be found in coffee shops and chop houses. The problem, according to Assael, was that "maintaining high standards of appropriate wholesomeness required raising tariffs to levels that

excluded the poorer workers that the reformers hoped to reach" and that vegetarian dining was a privilege largely enjoyed by better-off customers.⁴² Given that vegetarianism had been long advocated as a solution to malnourishment among the poor—the Vegetarian Society was, for one, co-founded by the Reverend William Cowherd who preached the value of abstinence to his impoverished Salford congregation and supplemented his sermons with free vegetable soup—the charge of exclusivity was potentially damaging to the cause. Recognizing this problem in his *Fifty Years of Food Reform*, Forward attempted to draw a clear line between restaurants run on the basis of "principles" and those opened "merely as commercial speculations," praising the former but concluding that the latter had done "much to prejudice the public against us."⁴³

Vegetarian restaurants were required to reconcile moral imperatives with commercial concerns, to operate as businesses while fulfilling their role as health evangelists, a tricky negotiation that exposed the diet's increasingly close relationship to the marketplace. In 1886 *All the Year Round* reported that dining rooms catering exclusively to "dyspeptics were soon to be opened in London" where a "doctor would examine each person as he or she entered and prescribe what was best suited for the customer."⁴⁴ Though the craze for physician-led ordering does not appear to have taken off, vegetarian restaurants arguably performed a similar role. Marketing their fare in terms of its health benefits, rather than on the basis of taste or even affordability, canny proprietors capitalized on the pathologization of desk work as inherently damaging to emotional and mental wellbeing. However, the scope of the vegetarian restaurant extended beyond individual health to engage with questions of collective identity, political organizing, and the gendering of urban space.

Suffragettes

The inclusion of the Eustace Miles Restaurant in his *Gourmet's Guide to London* was the result, Newnham-Davies claimed, of a chance encounter with an old army friend. While dining at the Cutlass and Crossbow Club, the author ran into Major-General Sir Ulysses Ratbourne, who was in dire need of culinary guidance. His nephew, it transpired, had just married and was coming up to London to dine with his uncle. This posed something of a problem because his nephew's new wife adhered to a strictly meat-free diet: "the General had put into

the word 'vegetarian' just the tone of astonished disgust he would have employed had he told me that the young lady was a militant suffragette."⁴⁵ Answering his friend's concerns, Newnham-Davies assured the General that all of his "niece's fads" would be catered to on Chandos Place and that one fleshless lunch would "do him no harm."⁴⁶ Further, given that the restaurant's proprietor was a Cambridge man and respected athlete who spent his school days Marlborough College, it was unlikely that the General would be forced to share a table with any of the dreaded "Radicals and Socialists" who were known to frequent other meat-free establishments in the capital.⁴⁷ This confidence may, however, have been misplaced. Though conventional in some respects—Miles hailed from a respectable family and moved in aristocratic circles—his restaurant played host to a variety of political lectures; progressive groups hired out meeting rooms; and the *Healthward Ho!* regularly featured articles on subjects like spiritualism, temperance, prison reform, animal welfare, and suffrage.⁴⁸

Women's political consciousness was formed in close relation to vegetarianism, both as an ethical stance and material practice. In the years leading up to the First World War meat-free restaurants provided spaces in which to bond and strategize.⁴⁹ The Eustace Miles Restaurant was especially popular with members of the suffrage movement, who made use of its private rooms, set up campaign pitches on the pavement outside, and held breakfasts to mark the release of activists from Holloway Prison. In April of 1907 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) gathered at the restaurant to celebrate the release of members imprisoned for their part in the United Procession of Women, a peaceful march from Hyde Park to the Strand, attended by thousands of suffrage campaigners from around Britain. According to a report in *The Times*, the released women were met at the prison gates by a brass band and paraded down Kingsway, before being treated to a "reformed" breakfast and a "rousing speech by 'Mrs Pankhurst'"; and a year later the same newspaper carried an account of another meat-free party for two activists jailed for "making disturbances" outside the Houses of Parliament.⁵⁰ If the General Ratbourne's vegetarian niece was not a "militant suffragette" before dining at the Eustace Miles Restaurant, she may well have left as one.

In Wells's *Ann Veronica*, a novel set during some of the most dramatic years of the suffrage campaign, the title character finds herself in a vegetarian eatery not unlike the Eustace Miles Restaurant. Having rebelled against her overbearing father and left the family home for a flat in North Hampstead, Ann Veronica Stanley begins

a degree in biology and eventually devotes herself to the cause of women's enfranchisement. In the years leading up to the publication of the novel, suffragettes made several attempts to enter Parliament and in October of 1908 the WSPU orchestrated a rush on the House of Commons. Wells, whose name appeared on a petition for female suffrage in 1909, places his heroine at the center of this action; she is arrested storming the Parliament and spends a month in Canongate Prison.⁵¹ On release, her aunt comes to collect her from the prison gates, but the two women find themselves swept up in a "triumphal procession to the Vindicator Vegetarian Restaurant." Confused between "what was official and what was merely a rebellious slight upon our national justice," Ann Veronica's elderly relative ends up on the "verge of a vegetarian meal before she recovered her head again."⁵²

Wells's scene is clearly drawn from reports of the celebratory breakfasts held at the Eustace Miles Restaurant, but it was not the only London establishment affiliated with the suffrage campaign. The Gardenia in Covent Garden also played host to meetings and dinners, as did the Criterion on Piccadilly and the Tea Cup Inn off Kingsway. Suffragettes also owned and operated several vegetarian restaurants, most notably the Minerva Café on High Holborn. Established in June of 1916 by the Women's Freedom League (WFL), a breakaway of the WSPU that advocated non-violent tactics, the business functioned as the group's headquarters and a means of generating income for the franchise campaign.⁵³ The president of the WFL, Charlotte Despard, was a committed vegetarian and the Minerva Café functioned as a site of political organizing for not only suffragettes, but anti-war activists, anarchists, and socialists also. When the Representation of the People Act was finally passed in 1918, the café served its patrons a celebratory menu of vegetable soup, lentil cutlets, and rhubarb tart. Meat-free eateries were essential spaces for these campaigns in part because vegetarianism was a key moral touchstone for many radicals in this period. After Alexandrine Veigelé established the Women's Vegetarian Union in 1895, the diet tendered itself as a cause for progressive women, alongside sexual reform, anti-vivisection, rational dress, and higher education; and early feminist journals like Margaret Sibthorp's *Shafts*—which ran from 1892 to 1899 and described itself as a "magazine of progressive thought"—frequently published vegetarian recipes and articles voicing support for the cause.⁵⁴

Beyond direct campaigning, vegetarian restaurants had a hand in opening up London to the increasing numbers of women employed in the city. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, middle-class

women began to gain access to waged work as teachers, nurses, librarians, and telegraphers in large numbers for the first time. Their entry into the labor market was most visible in the office, where the number of female workers grew from only 1,446 in 1871 to 124,843 in 1911.⁵⁵ The “marriage bar,” which prohibited married women from taking on certain forms of remunerative work, was still in place for most professions, so this expanding workforce was predominantly single, and the lives of these unattached women loomed large in the cultural imagination of the period. While novels like *Ann Veronica* and *The Odd Women* laid bare the precarity of lives lived in rented rooms, scraping by on insufficient wages, without the financial support of family or the protection of men, others like Ella Hepworth Dixon’s *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) and Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) celebrated the transformation of women through their engagement with labor and commerce. This new demographic of female workers was confronted with an urban environment that promised freedom, but which also contained challenges that had to be navigated on a daily basis. One of these hurdles was the problem of where to eat lunch. As lone diners, unaccompanied by male companions, women were unable to access much of the city’s dining culture: they were discouraged by the rowdy chauvinism of chop houses and cautioned against the impropriety of eating on the street, and some restaurants even barred women from eating alone on their premises. These restrictions, coupled with the persistent threat of harassment, made the question of lunch essential to the socio-economic progress of women.

Vegetarian restaurants were on the frontline in the battle for public space. During their late-Victorian heyday, they carved out a niche as respectable establishments in which lone women could dine without fear of approbation or molestation. This change was due, in part, to the fact that most of these restaurants did not serve alcohol and many discouraged smoking. But their reputation was also shaped by the conscious efforts of proprietors and activists. In 1889 a letter printed by *The Vegetarian* called on fellow reformers to answer the plight of “young working girls” who “for want of proper cooking accommodation are badly fed and ill nourished” and open up “cheap dining rooms” in the center of city. In doing so, the correspondent insisted, they would encourage the “wives of the future” to adopt a “pure diet” and thus greatly “advance the cause” of vegetarianism.⁵⁶ Recognizing the commercial potential of this underserved market, several restaurants went as far as to offer special facilities to encourage female customers: the St. George on Martin’s Lane, the Wheatsheaf in Clerkenwell, and

the Elephant in Soho all boasted ladies' tea rooms; the People's Café Company in Farringdon advertised a dedicated ladies' chess club; and the Pudding Bowl hosted an evening institute where women could learn practical skills, practice writing, and improve numeracy.⁵⁷

Meat-free establishments provided women with much more than an affordable lunch. Situated in the centre of the city, they offered a haven from the busy streets, where it was possible to socialise, organise and make connections with likeminded people. London's vegetarian restaurants made space for a range of progressive groups, from socialists to pacifists to anarchists, so that the experience of dining was as much intellectual as alimentary.

In addition to hosting suffrage meetings, the Eustace Miles Restaurant also sought to appeal to women as workers and homemakers. While Miles—celebrated tennis player and celebrity physical culturist—championed a distinctly masculine brand of vegetarianism, his wife Hallie pressed the virtue and utility of the fleshless diet for women. More than a wifely helpmeet, she took on a key role in building and maintaining the couple's health food empire. On his visit to the restaurant, Newnham-Davies found "Mrs Eustace Miles" busy opening letters and running the bookstall, which stocked titles authored by her like *The Ideal Home and its Problems* (1911) and *Economy in War Time: Or, Health Without Meat* (1915).⁵⁸ Hallie also contributed a column to the *Eustace Miles Monthly Booklet* where she advised women on how to raise healthy children, manage meat-free households, and overcome common ailments through dietary change. Elsewhere, adverts for products like Emprote and EM Bread emphasized not only their health-giving properties, but also the convenience of foods that "need no cooking" for women caught up in the "bustle" of the modern city.⁵⁹ Bridging the gap between public and private, the Eustace Miles Restaurant sold a lifestyle and marketed it directly to the "ladies who might be stenographers" whom Newnham-Davies sat next to at lunch.⁶⁰ While in *The Odd Women* meat-free eating is symptom of hardship and in *Ann Veronica* it serves as a marker of political radicalism, London's vegetarian restaurants appear to have played a far more complex role in the lives of women than either portrayal suggests.

Conclusion

To conclude with a return visit to *Punch's* "Nebuchadnezzar's Head," it is perhaps not particularly surprising that vegetarian res-

taurants attracted the attention of satirists. Serving menus filled with eccentric dishes—"Flageolet Fritters" and "Cinghalese Stew"—to earnest hat-avoiding men and unorthodox overeducated women, such establishments invited the scorn of mainstream society. Like Mr. and Mrs. Goopes in *Ann Veronica*, an odd "little couple" who make their own "pyjama-shaped" clothes, debate the value of "Anarchism" and follow a "fruitarian career," vegetarians were often represented as wrongheaded faddists in the popular culture of the period.⁶¹ It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss vegetarian restaurants as only the preserve of cranks and fanatics. As *Forward's* map illustrates, London's vegetarian restaurants were located in the center of the city, situated on busy streets and primed to take advantage of passing trade (fig. 1). Far from marginal, they proved popular with a diverse range of customers: hungry office workers, low-paid clerks, and female typists in search of somewhere respectable to eat lunch. Though their patrons were not necessarily committed vegetarians, they may still have been attracted by the promise of health held out by meat-free eateries. Venues like the Eustace Miles Restaurant contributed to a broader dietary reform movement, which was propelled by the rise of nutritional science and facilitated by a growing consumer market for health-related products. Speaking to a collective unease at a rapidly urbanizing and modernizing world, vegetarianism was grounded in a vision of the Edenic and the natural. Restaurants, real and fictional, served as idealized spaces; as George Bernard Shaw recalled of his dietary conversion, having been corrupted by the "reek of the slaughterhouse" he eventually "fled to the purer air of the vegetarian restaurant."⁶² This "purer" atmosphere was also one in which radical discourse and activism could flourish. The importance of vegetarian restaurants to the suffrage campaign—as spaces for meeting and organizing—suggests that political histories might sometimes be shaped by what we choose to consume. Mapped more broadly onto the history of London around the turn of the twentieth century, vegetarian restaurants emerge as key spaces in which the complex entanglements of health, gender, and work were negotiated.

NOTES

1. Burnand, "At a Vegetarian Restaurant," 22.
2. Burnand, "At a Vegetarian Restaurant," 31.
3. See Tristram Stuart, *Bloodless Revolution*, and Colin Spencer's *Heretic's Feast* for an account of the longer history of the meat-free diet.
4. Williams, "Propaganda," 151.

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5. Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, 134–41.
6. Forward, *Fifty Years of Food Reform*, 103.
7. Forward, *Fifty Years of Food Reform*, 104.
8. Doyle, "Red Headed League," 198–99.
9. Assael, *London Restaurant*, 2.
10. Forster, *Howards End*, 160.
11. Miles, *Muscle, Brain and Diet*, v.
12. "A Meal at Miles's," 274.
13. Miles, *Failures of Vegetarianism*, 28.
14. Miles, *Failures of Vegetarianism*, 18.
15. Miles, *Builders of the Body*, 65.
16. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 77.
17. "Eustace Miles Restaurant and Salon."
18. "A Restaurant with Ideals."
19. "A Meal at Miles's," 274.
20. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 77.
21. Chesterton, "There is Poetry in Nearly Everything," 437.
22. Forster, *Howards End*, 168.
23. Machen, "The Bowmen," 3; Wells, *Ann Veronica*, 159; and Wells, *Passionate Friends*, 330.
24. Gissing, *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 261.
25. Gissing, *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 261.
26. Outka, *Consuming Traditions*, 1.
27. Assael, *London Restaurant*, 111.
28. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 78.
29. Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, 136.
30. "Another City Clerk," 67.
31. "Eastward Ho!," 23.
32. Paris, *A Treatise on Diet*, 303.
33. Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 92.
34. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, 1.
35. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, 2.
36. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, 3–9.
37. Gissing, "Simple Simon," 509.
38. Gissing, *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 261.
39. Gissing, *Odd Women*, 12.
40. Gissing, *Odd Women*, 28.
41. "Alpha"; Assael, *London Restaurant*, 151.
42. Assael, *London Restaurant*, 134.
43. Forward, *Fifty Years of Food Reform*, 103.
44. "Diet and Dyspepsia," *All the Year Round*, 545.
45. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 73–74.
46. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 74, 80.
47. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 74.
48. Allen, "Eustace Hamilton Miles."
49. See Leneman, "Awakened Instinct," for a detailed account of vegetarianism in the British suffrage movement.
50. "Release of Suffragettes" and "Release of Women Suffragists," 2.
51. "Suffrage Petition," 2, and Wells, *Ann Veronica*, 256.
52. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, 28.
53. Crawford, *Women's Suffrage Movement*, 104.
54. See Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, 63–173, for an account of feminism and vegetarianism in late nineteenth-century Britain.
55. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, 111.

56. "Our Working Girls," 53.
57. Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, 135.
58. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 79.
59. "Emprote: The Body-Building Meat Substitute," 2.
60. Newnham-Davies, *Gourmet's Guide to London*, 77.
61. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, 157.
62. George Bernard Shaw qtd. in Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. 1, 87.

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