

THE KITCHEN IN BATTLE
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR DOING WITHOUT MEAT

- by -

Yenn Chitalé

HOME SERVICE: TUESDAY, 21st JANUARY, 1940: 10.45-11.00 a.m.

When I was getting ready to come over to England a few years ago, an English friend said to me, "Really, you will have to learn to eat meat, you know, otherwise I don't know how you will manage to exist." It may sound rather silly but her remark made me feel quite pessimistic. I thought vegetables, lentils and rice would be almost unobtainable in this country.

You see in my community in India, meat, fish and eggs have been absolutely unknown as foodstuffs for nearly three thousand years. There are other communities who eat meat only once a week or so, and even those who eat it regularly can prepare equally nourishing dishes if meat is unobtainable.

The ideal diet in my community would usually consist of milk products, lentils and similar pulses, rice, wheat and other grains, and plenty of vegetables and fruit.

Perhaps you will find it difficult to believe that such a diet can produce really strong and healthy people. But I can tell you that my uncle once pulled a cow out of a well, single-handed ... and please don't think this is just an oriental legend ... And when we were children my father had a friend who to amuse us, used to bend an iron bar with his hands. But even if these should be considered exceptions, there are the normal people who live normal healthy lives on a completely meatless, fishless and eggless diet. For my part, I did not even know what an egg looked like inside until I

came to this country.

I have been over here now for several years, and have kept myself as fit and fed as in my own country without meat or fish. As far as my diet is concerned I have hardly felt the war at all. I must admit, of course, that I rather miss the onions.

Perhaps, whenever you hear somebody mention "Indian food", you say "Ah, curry!" Of course, we do have a lot of curry, but a great number of our savoury dishes do not contain even a pinch of curry powder.

You make so many tasty dishes of meat and fish, so perhaps you don't trouble much about lentils, for instance, and vegetables. We, on the other hand, live entirely on pulses (that is, things like lentils) and grains and vegetables. They must not only be nourishing, but also appetising and tasty.

You might wonder how we are nourished without ever having any meat. Well, I'm not going to talk about Vitamins - I can only repeat that we have lived on this diet for centuries, our soldiers have fought, our labourers have worked and our brain-workers and others have flourished.

Of course, everybody knows of the valuable mineral salts and body building properties in vegetables, wheat, oats, rice and lentils. But the point is how to make these dull-sounding products into attractive and appetising dishes.

I for my part, could always either curry them or turn them into Indian savouries. But I share a flat with an English friend and we do our own cooking. As she can't cope with a curry every day I have been trying different dishes on her, always of course, without meat or fish. She seems to thrive on them. At first she thought she would be hungry in an hour's time if she did not have a good helping of meat.

But she soon changed her mind, and now does not miss meat at all. Naturally, I always make a dish which I call a meat substitute, and for this I use cheese, if I can get it, or lentils, peas or beans.

Lentil cutlets, or rissoles made from split peas, served with a thick gravy, and two vegetables, say potatoes and cabbage, make a substantial course. There are many recipes for lentil cutlets, but next time you make some do try mixing one part of mashed potatoes to every three parts of lentils just for a change. I find it quite an improvement to add a little of my favourite bottled sauce to the mixture. Of course, a bit of chopped parsley or watercress in the mixture is very good too.

I knew you have a dish which you call "Sausages and Mash." I also have a dish which I call Bean Sausages and Mash." I cook the beans until tender - butter beans, haricot beans or any beans I can get. Then mash them fine with a fork, adding some mashed potato, and a little ^{WMA sauce} ~~flour~~ to hold the mixture together. Then add pepper, salt and flavour with sauce or parsley; shape into thin sausages, roll in breadcrumbs and fry till brown. I pile these "sausages" on to a nice heap of mashed potato, and pour a thick gravy over the lot. For the gravy I use one of the non-meat gravy preparations, but of course there are many other gravy preparations on the market too. ~~A little fried tomato goes very well with this dish, and a green vegetable completes it.~~

Vegetable pies and hot pots are other important savoury dishes in our flat, but I find that they do only for supper dishes, as they are not as substantial as a meal with lentil cutlets or bean sausages.

My friend always seemed to think of rice only in terms of rice pudding. But I have introduced her to many savoury

rice dishes, besides curry and rice, and Indian rice Pulao. Now she votes for "Cheese Pulao" every time I say "rice". It is made like this:

Glenn
Cut some boiled potatoes into cubes; add them and some boiled sprouts or cauliflower to cooked rice; add a little milk and some grated cheese, salt and pepper. Mix together lightly so that the vegetables don't get mashed. Pour into a lightly greased casserole, which is to be left uncovered, and bake for ten to fifteen minutes in a moderate oven. This is a very satisfying dish and complete in itself.

Apart from these savoury dishes, there are also so many ways of cooking ordinary vegetables. Take cabbage, for instance. And by cabbage I mean ordinary cabbage, savoy or sprouts. Of course, you have your own way of cooking them - ~~just plain~~ boiled. But if you feel like a change try doing them this way:

Put a little cooking fat or dripping or margarine in the saucepan; when it is melted pour in the chopped up cabbage. Stir well over a medium fire for a minute or two. Then let it simmer for five or seven minutes with the lid on, so that the steam will prevent it from frying, making sure that it doesn't burn. Add a pinch of salt and a pinch of sugar, and about a cup of boiling water for a large cabbage. Close the saucepan and let the cabbage cook on a low stove until it is quite tender and no water is left. It is then ready to be served.

Because I can't afford to waste any of the mineral salts that vegetables provide, I do not cook them in large quantities of water. If I want vegetable stock, I make it specially. The vegetables I use for it, I rub through a sieve, and add to the stock making it as thick as I want it.

Now as far as carrots are concerned, we all know that they are healthy, but as a rule we aren't exactly thrilled with them. But even they can be coaxed to be quite delicious.

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A favourite way with my English friend, is to start some sliced carrot in a little melted fat on a low stove. I then cover the saucepan and let the carrots steam in their own juice and the fat until they're done; Of course, stirring them every now and again. Don't forget the pinch of salt. Parsnips can be done in exactly the same way.

Another way of doing carrots, which is surprisingly good, is to grate raw carrot on a fine grate, and mix with half the amount of grated apple. Pour over this some salad cream, or home made salad dressing, and serve with rissoles or savoury dishes. If you haven't got an apple handy mix the carrot lightly with some mashed potato. This is just as good.

I wonder if you will be interested to know what an Indian housewife would do if she were in Britain today with the commodities that are now available on the market.

For one, she could prepare potatoes in at least nine or ten different ways; and rice in as many ways too, thus providing a variety. For a complete meal she would choose; rice, oatmeal or wheat-flour, potatoes, lentils, carrots, and two green vegetables.

The lentils and ~~two green~~ vegetables would be combined into a curry which would go over the rice; the potatoes would be made into a special dish called "Bhaji", and the carrots would be grated raw for a salad; lastly, the oatmeal or the wheat-flour would be made into girdle cakes to serve as bread. For a sweet she would use any available fruit. And she would consider this an entirely sufficient meal. (12)

If you feel like trying one kind of lentil curry, the following is a very simple way. The only unusual things you will need would be mustard seeds, tumeric powder and if you want it hot some red pepper. These I have had no difficulty

in obtaining, at my grocer's.

Clean and chop up a pound of potatoes and half a pound of sprouts or cabbage. Boil a cup full of lentils until done. Put three quarters of an ounce of cooking fat in a saucepan and heat thoroughly. Put a level teaspoonful of mustard seeds in the hot fat and close the saucepan until the seeds have stopped popping. Sprinkle in half a teaspoonful of tumeric powder and pour in the vegetables, stir for a minute or two, and pour in the cooked lentils. Add three cups of boiling water, add salt to taste and a pinch of red pepper if wanted, and half a teaspoonful of any curry powder. Boil until the vegetables are done. The curry when ready should have the consistency of a thin stew. Serve over rice. The flavour would be spoilt if too much tumeric is added.

The reason why we can keep up our strength so easily on a meatless diet, is not only because we have specific foods, which might be called meat substitutes, but because we do not allow any goodness to be wasted from anything we cook. The secret of this is to cook vegetables as well as other things in the minimum of water, so that there is no water left to drain off at the end.

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I am sure you need not believe that I am a
a human being who is prepared to accept the
the body will be able to do it. I am sure
happy in a few weeks time in the same way