

## Vegetarian Classic

### **Radical Vegetarianism, A Dialectic of Diet and Ethic**

By Mark Mathew Braunstein  
Panjandrum Books, Los Angeles  
1981, 140 pages, \$17.95 hard  
\$7.95 soft

**R**adical Vegetarianism is a feast, a feast of words. Its prose barely misses poetry and anyone with a fondness for the English language would read it with relish. Yet beyond his wordsmithing, Braunstein makes in *Radical Vegetarianism* the point he sets out to: "to persuade ethical vegetarians of the moral necessity of health and to convince those concerned only with nutrition to consider also the unhealthy consequences of perdition."

Delight in or detest the literary embellishments, no one could find *Radical Vegetarianism* less than unique. It contains no recipes, no nutrient tables or lists of famous vegetarians (although there are wonderful quotes from many of them). What is offered instead is a dialectic to promote thought and subsequent action. Nutrition is discussed at the outset but the emphasis is on physical and spiritual health as an inseparable partnership. "Not only is physical health possible through vegetarianism," Braunstein writes, "spiritual health actually demands such a diet."

An explosive chapter is that on veganism, "The Milky Way." In the noble tradition of calling a spade

precisely that, Braunstein labels lacto-vegetarianism "a modified carnivorousness." The arguments are heavy—too much so for some tastes—but truth is like that. "Veal floats invisibly in everyone's milk... Milk is but blood modified by mammary glands... Because we are now slaves to milk, cows are slaves to us."

When it was initially published in 1981, *Radical Vegetarianism* was, well, radical. It was in any case something of an advanced text for vegetarians who wanted to go further along that path. With today's increased awareness of both animal rights and natural foods, however, the book has become

appropriate for the novice. It's as if society has caught up with Braunstein.

His chapter, "Letter to a Young Vegetarian," answers the elementary questions (protein, calcium, and the like) and animal rights are boldly propounded elsewhere. "Western religion," he says on this, "and to some similar degree Western philosophy, exclude animals from their ethics as intently as flesh cookbooks leave

out telling about the screams of pain." Other issues of interest to some vegetarians (the superiority of raw foods, for example, and the practice of fasting) are also given their due.

If vegetarianism has its cult classic, this is it. There is in places brutal honesty, shocking and raw, and in others poignant beauty. Often they coexist in a single sentence. Together they carry the message of radical vegetarianism,

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the vegetarianism that exists in theory and in practice, that is soul-deep and dedicated, that which can make a difference in a life, or on a planet. □

—Victoria Moran

