

Perspective



Man's Reverence of the "Natural" Is an Expression of Inferiority Complex

JACOB ROSIN and MAX EASTMAN
Authors of "The Road to Abundance"

MANKIND SUFFERS from a collective inferiority complex which finds expression in certain mental attitudes which persist through centuries, defying all evidence accumulated against them. These notions are: underestimation of the potentialities of natural science, especially chemistry; skepticism toward revolutionary technological ideas, which are always considered utopian and fantastic right up to the moment of their realization; high admiration and respect for everything "natural" coupled with suspicion and disdain for everything man-made and synthetic, which is considered an "ersatz," a poor imitation of something altogether perfect as nature produced it.

This inferiority complex is not limited to laymen, but is common also among scientists, chemists included. In fact it has been and still is the most important single factor regarding the progress of science. This inferiority complex explains the survival up to the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century of the nonsensical *vis vitalis* theory. According to this theory no substance produced by a living organism (animal or plant) can be produced synthetically; only the mysterious *vis vitalis* (vital force) can accomplish this feat.

When it comes to food our conservatism makes a holy alliance with superstition and plain ignorance. Together they erect a stone wall of prejudice to defend the deity, "natural," as against the demon, "artificial." The credo "only natural food is wholesome" becomes practically a religious dogma. For want of an inquisition to enforce compliance with this dogma, various influential agencies undertake to weed out and expose to the wrath of the public all trespasses by chemistry upon the holy of holies—"natural food."

Natural food, however, happens to be a mixture of chemicals with nothing unusual about them. What is more, these chemicals were never created or designed for human consumption as food. The starch of the potato is meant by

nature to be a food reservoir for the potato plant, not the human stomach; the milk of the cow is meant for calves, not for human beings; and there are no signs that nature created cattle for the purpose of being slaughtered by men.

There is, therefore, nothing profoundly natural about our eating natural food. To take an example: The proteins of animals and vegetables are so alien to the individual proteins of each human being that they have to be broken down into amino acids by our digestive system before our organism can start synthesizing out of them our own individual proteins. A balanced mixture of amino acids to start with is thus a more logical raw material for the natural synthesis of our body proteins than the animal and vegetable proteins we eat. All of which does not alter the fact that should such a mixture of amino acids be offered on the market as a meat substitute, it would be promptly excluded from over-the-counter sale as a drug that is "dangerous" without a prescription by a physician.

Of course, it would be presumptuous to pretend that we know everything about nutrition. But this is no argument against synthetic food, since it is equally valid against any given diet of natural food. Eskimos eat an assortment of foods which has no resemblance to the diet of negroes in central Africa. Both peoples became adapted to their respective diets without benefit of scientific warning about the unknown vitamins. If they succeeded in solving this problem by trial and error, it is ridiculous to assume that modern man, with all his great scientific resources, is going to get "stuck" with synthetic food which does not have all the required ingredients. Synthetic food is not going to descend upon us like manna on one beautiful morning but is going to be introduced by slow stages after ample physiological experimentation.

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