

## *The World is a Mighty Slaughterhouse\**

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In one point of view, nearly every argument which can be brought to show the superiority of a vegetable diet over one that includes flesh or fish, is a moral argument.

Thus, if man is so constituted by his structure, and by the laws of his animal economy, that all the functions of the body, and of course all the faculties of the mind, and the affections of the soul, are in better condition—better subserve our own purposes, and the purposes of the great Creator—as well as hold out longer, on the vegetable system—then it is desirable, in a moral point of view, to adopt it. If mankind lose, upon the average, two years of their lives by sickness, as some have estimated it, saying nothing of the pain and suffering undergone, or of the mental anguish and soul torment which grow out of it, and often render life a burden; and if the simple primitive custom of living on vegetables and fruits, along with other good physical and mental habits, which seem naturally connected with it, will, in time, nearly if not wholly remove or prevent this amazing loss, then is the argument deduced therefrom . . . a moral argument.

If, as I have endeavored to show [in earlier sections], the adoption of the vegetable system by nations and individuals, would greatly advance the happiness of all, in every known respect, and if, on this account, such a change in our flesh-eating countries would be sound policy, and good economy—then we have another moral argument in its favor.

But, again: if it be true that all nations have been the most virtuous and flourishing, other things being equal, in the days of their simplicity in regard to food, drink, etc.; and if we can, in every instance, connect the decline of a nation with the period of their departure, as a nation, into the maze of luxurious and enervating habits; and if this doctrine is, as a general rule, obviously applicable to smaller classes of men, down to single families, then is the argument we derive from it in its nature a moral one. Whatever really tends, without the possibility of mistake, to the promotion of human happiness, here and hereafter, is, without doubt, moral.

But this, though much, is not all. The destruction of animals for food, in its details and tendencies, involves so much of cruelty as to cause every reflecting individual—not destitute of the ordinary sensibilities of our nature—to shudder. I recall: daily observation shows that such is not the fact; nor should it, upon second thought, be expected. Where all are dark, the color is not perceived; and so universally are the moral sensibilities which really belong to human nature deadened by the customs which prevail among us, that few, if any, know how to estimate, rightly, the evil of which I speak. They have no more a correct idea of a true sensibility—not a *morbid* one—on this subject, than a blind man has of colors; and for nearly the same reasons. And on this account it is, that I seem to shrink from presenting, at this time, those considerations which, I know, cannot, from the very nature of the case, be properly understood or appreciated, except by a very few.

Still, there are some things which, I trust, may be made plain. It must be obvious that the custom of rendering children familiar with the taking away of life, even when it is done with a good degree of tenderness, cannot have a very happy effect. But, when this is done, not only without tenderness or sympathy, but often with manifestations of great pleasure, and when children, as in some cases, are almost constant witnesses of such scenes, how dreadful must be the results!

In this view, the world, I mean our own portion of it, sometimes seems to me like one mighty

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slaughterhouse—one grand school for the suppression of every kind, and tender, and brotherly feeling—one grand process of education to the entire destitution of all moral principle—one vast scene of destruction to all moral sensibility, and all sympathy with the woes of those around us. Is it not so?

I have seen many boys who shuddered, at first, at the thought of taking the life, even of a snake, until compelled to it by what they conceived to be duty; and who shuddered still more at taking the life of a lamb, a calf, a pig, or a fowl. And yet I have seen these same boys, in subsequent life, become so changed, that they could look on such scenes not merely with indifference, but with gratification. Is this change of feeling desirable? How long is it after we begin to look with indifference on pain and suffering in brutes, before we begin to be less affected than before by human suffering?

I am not ignorant that sentiments like these are either regarded as morbid, and therefore pitiable, or as affected, and therefore ridiculous. . . .

I am not prepared to maintain, strongly, the old-fashioned doctrine, that a butcher who commences his employment at adult age, is necessarily rendered hard-hearted or unfeeling; or, that they who eat flesh have their sensibilities deadened, and their passions inflamed by it—though I am not sure that there is not some truth in it. I only maintain, that to render children familiar with the taking away of animal life—especially the lives of our own domestic animals, often endeared to us by many interesting circumstances of their history, or of our own, in relation to them—cannot be otherwise than unhappy in its tendency.

How shocking it must be to the inhabitants of Jupiter, or some other planet, who had never before witnessed these sad effects of the ingress of sin among us, to see the carcasses of animals, either whole or by piecemeal, hoisted upon our very tables before the faces of children of all ages, from the infant at the breast, to the child of ten or twelve, or fourteen, and carved, and swallowed; and this not merely once, but from day to day, through life! What could they— what would they—expect from such an education of the young mind and heart? What, indeed, but mourning, desolation, and woe!

On this subject the First Annual Report of the American Physiological Society thus remarks—and I wish the remark might have its due weight on the mind of the reader:

"How can it be right to be instrumental in so much unnecessary slaughter? How can it be right, especially for a country of vegetable abundance like ours, to give daily employment to twenty thousand or thirty thousand butchers? How can it be right to train our children to behold such slaughter? How can it be right to blunt the edge of their moral sensibilities, by placing before them, at almost every meal, the mangled corpses of the slain; and not only placing them there, but rejoicing while we feast upon them?"

One striking evidence of the tendency which an habitual shedding of blood has on the mind and heart, is found in the fact that females are generally so reluctant to take away life, that notwithstanding they are trained to a fondness for all sorts of animal food, very few are willing to gratify their desires for a stimulating diet, by becoming their own butchers. I have indeed seen females who would kill a fowl or a lamb rather than go without it; but they are exceedingly rare. And who would not regard female character as tarnished by a familiarity with such scenes as those to which I have referred? But if the keen edge of female delicacy and sensibility would be blunted by scenes of bloodshed, are not the moral sensibilities of our own sex affected in a similar way? And must it not, then, have a deteriorating tendency?

It cannot be otherwise than that the circumstances of which I have spoken, which so universally surround infancy and childhood, should take off, gradually, the keen edge of moral sensibility, and lessen every virtuous or holy sympathy. I have watched—I believe impartially—

the effect on certain sensitive young persons in the circle of my acquaintance. I have watched myself. The result has confirmed the opinion I have just expressed. No child, I think, can walk through a common market or slaughterhouse without receiving a moral injury; nor am I quite sure that any virtuous adult can.

How have I been struck with the change produced in the young mind by that merriment which often accompanies the slaughter of an innocent fowl, or lamb, or pig! How can the Christian, with the Bible in hand, and the merciful doctrines of its pages for his text, "Teach me to feel another's woe,"—the beast's not excepted—and yet, having laid down that Bible, go at once from the domestic altar to make light of the convulsions and exit of a poor domestic animal?

Is it said that these remarks apply only to the *abuse* of a thing which, in its place, is proper? Is it said, that there is no necessity of levity on these occasions? Grant that there is none; still the result is almost inevitable. But there is, in any event, one way of avoiding, or rather preventing both the abuse and the occasion for abuse, by ceasing to kill animals for food; and I venture to predict that the evil never will be prevented otherwise.

The usual apology for hunting and fishing, in all their various and often cruel forms—whereby so many of our youth, from the setters of snares for birds, and the anglers for trout, to the whalemens, are educated to cruelty, and steeled to every virtuous and holy sympathy—is, the necessity of the animals whom we pursue for food. I know, indeed, that this is not, in most cases, the true reason, but it *is* the reason given—it is the substance of the reason. It serves as an apology. They who make it may often be ignorant of the true reason, or they or others may wish to conceal it; and, true to human nature, they are ready to give every reason for their conduct, but the real and most efficient one.

It must not, indeed, be concealed that there is one more apology usually made for these cruel sports; and made too, in some instances, by good men; I mean, by men whose intentions are in the main pure and excellent. These sports are healthy, they tell us. They are a relief to mind and body. Perhaps no good man, in our own country, had defended them with more ingenuity, or with more show of reason and good sense, than Dr. Comstock, in his recent popular work on human physiology. And yet, there is scarcely a single advantage which he has pointed out, as being derived from the "pleasures of the chase," that may not be gained in a way which savors less of blood. The doctor himself is too much in love with botany, geology, mineralogy, and the various branches of natural history, not to know what I mean when I say this. He knows full well the excitement, and, on his own principles, the consequent relief of body and mind from their accustomed and often painful round, which grows out of clambering over mountains and hills, and fording streams, and climbing trees and rocks, to need any very broad hints on the subject; to say nothing of the delights of agriculture and horticulture. How could he, then, give currency to practices which, to say the least—and by his own concessions, too—are doubtful in regard to their moral tendencies, by inserting his opinions in favor of sports, for which he himself happens to be partial, in a schoolbook? Is this worthy of those who would educate the youth of our land on the principles of the Bible?