

*They Pity, and Eat the Objects of Their Compassion**

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

From Lien Chi Altangi, to Fum Hoam, first president of the Ceremonial Academy at Pekin, in China. The better sort here pretend to the utmost compassion for animals of every kind: to hear them speak, a stranger would be apt to imagine they could hardly hurt the gnat that stung them; they seem so tender and so full of pity, that one would take them for the harmless friends of the whole creation; the protectors of the meanest insect or reptile that was privileged with existence. And yet (would you believe it?) I have seen the very men who have thus boasted of their tenderness, at the same time devouring the flesh of six different animals tossed up in a fricasee. Strange contrariety of conduct! They pity, and they eat the objects of their compassion! The lion roars with terror over its captive; the tiger sends forth its hideous shriek to intimidate its prey; no creature shows any fondness for its short-lived prisoner, except a man and a cat.

Man was born to live with innocence and simplicity, but he has deviated from nature; he was born to share the bounties of heaven, but he has monopolized them; he was born to govern the brute creation, but he is become their tyrant. If an epicure now shall happen to surfeit on his last night's feast, twenty animals the next day are to undergo the most exquisite tortures, in order to provoke his appetite to another guilty meal. Hail, O ye simple, honest brahmins of the East; ye inoffensive friends of all that were born to happiness as well as you; you never sought a short-lived pleasure from the miseries of other creatures! You never studied the tormenting arts of ingenious refinement; you never surfeited upon a guilty meal! How much more purified and refined are your sensations than ours! You distinguish every element with the utmost precision; a stream untasted before is new luxury, a change of air is a new banquet, too refined for Western imaginations to conceive. Though the Europeans do not hold the transmigration of souls, yet one of their doctors has, with great force of argument, and great plausibility of reasoning, endeavoured to prove, that the bodies of animals are the habitations of demons and wicked spirits, which are obliged to reside in these prisons till the resurrection pronounces their everlasting punishment; but are previously condemned to suffer all the pains and hardships inflicted upon them by man, or by each other, here. If this be the case, it may frequently happen, that while we whip pigs to death, or boil live lobsters, we are putting some old acquaintance, some near relation, to excruciating tortures, and are serving him up to the very table where he was once the most welcome companion.

"Kabul," says the Zendevesta, "was born on the rushy banks of the river Mawra; his possessions were great, and his luxuries kept pace with the affluence of his fortune; he hated the harmless brahmins, and despised their holy religion; every day his table was decked out with the flesh of a hundred different animals, and his cooks had a hundred different ways of dressing it, to solicit even satiety.

"Notwithstanding all his eating, he did not arrive at old age; he died of a surfeit, caused by intemperance: upon this, his soul was carried off, in order to take its trial before a select assembly of the souls of those animals which his gluttony had caused to be slain, and who were now appointed his judges.

"He trembled before a tribunal, to every member of which he had formerly acted as an unmerciful tyrant; he sought for pity, but found none disposed to grant it. Does he not remember, cries the angry boar, to what agonies I was put, not to satisfy his hunger, but his vanity? I was first hunted to death, and my flesh scarce thought worthy of coming once to his table. Were my advice followed, he should do penance in the shape of a hog, which in life he

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most resembled.

"I am rather, cries a sheep upon the bench, for having him suffer under the appearance of a lamb; we may then send him through four or five transmigrations in the space of a month. Were my voice of any weight in the assembly, cries a calf, he should rather assume such a form as mine; I was bled every day, in order to make my flesh white, and at last killed without mercy. Would it not be wiser, cries a hen, to cram him in the shape of a fowl, and then smother him in his own blood, as I was served? The majority of the assembly were pleased with this punishment, and were going to condemn him without further delay, when the ox rose up to give his opinion: I am informed, says this counsellor, that the prisoner at the bar has left a wife with child behind him. By my knowledge in divination, I foresee that this child will be a son, decrepit, feeble, sick, a plague to himself, and all about him. What say you, then, my companions, if we condemn the father to animate the body of his own son; and by this means make him feel in himself those miseries his intemperance must otherwise have entailed upon his posterity? The whole court applauded the ingenuity of his torture; they thanked him for his advice. Kabul was driven once more to revisit the earth; and his soul in the body of his own son, passed a period of thirty years, loaded with misery, anxiety, and disease."