

[FOR THE INDEX.]

Rights of Animals.

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The readers of THE INDEX are often warned that the precept of special love between Christian brethren has been antagonistic to the duty of loving men as men. It *ought not* to be so, but (it is complained) such is the tendency, and such the result. This is indeed but a single case of a broader proposition, a wider practical danger. Patriotism is right; yet the love of country often entails injustice to foreigners. So when special clubs arise in political emergencies, it is an ancient remark that the "brotherhood," the party, undermines patriotism, and even common justice. But this is not all. There is an egotism of the human species also, which, in devotion to the interests of *man*, forgets or denies the rights of whatever is *not man*. On this topic it is proposed now to write.

It is easy to quote from the Hebrew Scriptures texts which recommend the kind treatment of animals. They are not numerous, but they are decisive. In the Christian books nothing very definite may be found, yet inferentially the duty of gentleness and mercy to animals is contained beyond a doubt in numerous precepts and principles. Notwithstanding this, it is an undeniable fact that the oriental sarcasm which calls Christendom the "Hell of Animals" has a grievous basis of truth. Cruelties are perpetrated on the greatest scale, incessantly and through ages, and no remonstrance arises from any of the churches, as such, though now and then the indignation of individuals swells into an outcry, and some little alleviation follows. But even so, no principles of action are firmly laid down. Cruelty to a living creature is deprecated,—when gratuitous,—but no one utters the maxim that "living creatures have *some rights*," much less tries to define what rights. It has long appeared to me that this is among the moral defects of historical Christianity, which a rightly developed Theism ought to correct. Let the thing complained of be first clearly stated, and next let the causes be denoted, so far as possible.

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We have a history of cruelty. Gladiatorial shows, in which men slaughtered men for the amusement of spectators, when suppressed, were succeeded by various substitutes in different countries, as by bull-fights in Spain. In England, we had bear-baiting, and badger-baiting, cock-fights, and other such sports, besides the mauling of man by man with the fist, a relic of antiquity which does not here concern us. These "sports" have been sustained by the zeal of a part of the English aristocracy, in alliance with a very disreputable class of the people. They are now suppressed by the police, and may seem to be extinct; but still without the enunciation of any well defined principle. Pigeon-shooting for sport remains, but has suddenly become disreputable in the course of the last year or two; insomuch that apparently a real check has been given to the practice. There has been much writing against salmon-fishing with line and rod, against fox-hunting, and hare-hunting, indicative of a new sentiment widely spread among writers for the press. But the topic appears to be considered beneath the dignity of the pulpit: no church nor leading church-organ pronounces upon it. Laws have recently been passed to forbid fishing for salmon in unsuitable times, or modes, or killing certain sea-birds while they are breeding: but all this is in the interest of man, not in consideration of any right possessed by the animals. Shooting at wild birds and beasts is still considered, not as necessary butchery, but as gentlemanly amusement. The most frightful cruelties are incessantly inflicted on innocent animals by traps with iron teeth, and other fell devices; which continue to be legal and reputable, in spite of the execrations occasionally heard from certain quarters. Yet a voluntary society, which at first encountered ridicule, has in half a century left a distinct impress on England, and on English law, to enforce the humane treatment of animals. It is no longer ridiculed. It receives high patronage, and among its patrons no name is to be mentioned with more honor than that of Baroness Coutts. We English have made some progress, in a part of the community, towards a gentler conception of our duty towards our humblest friends and servants; but it is not easy to define how much.

Can we justly claim to have repudiated, as applied to animals, the celebrated verdict against Dred Scott? "Animals have no rights which men are bound to respect?" It may be replied, "Yes: they can claim as a right not to be subject to needless cruelty." *Needless!* Much turns on that word. In the cause of science (a very indefinite phrase), animals are subjected to the most exquisite tortures. Fifty years ago, the discoveries made concerning the nerves at the expense of suffering innocents threw a glare of splendor around VIVISECTION; and it was thought legitimate to torture cats, rabbits, dogs, and horses, for the instruction of medical pupils, or to repeat and confirm a discovery. This is now disproved by some medical men, probably by many; others totally explode the defence that human welfare *requires* such cruelties. Eminent physicians have protested that no advantage has accrued to the art of healing from any of these horrors; but it is rare indeed for a physician to avow that they cannot be justified by the desire and hope of extending human *knowledge*; moreover, the practice of vivisection, with agonies which those who have witnessed them avow to be too dreadful to narrate, continues systematic, and (I fear) not much abated. Little now is talked of it: the public conscience is known to be uneasy. In sport, our middle-class youth ape the cruelties of the richest. It was in the papers, not long back, that a company of young men in Australia went out with guns for the fun of shooting large bats, which were known

to live in a certain grove. The poor animals, aroused from sleep, fluttered about blinded in the daylight, and fell easy victims. The young men had the satisfaction to boast that they left on the ground more than one hundred and fifty harmless bats, dead or wounded, and lingering in agony.

Not science only, nor sport only, but cookery also claims its victims. A wholesome stir has been made in the press of late against the cruelties perpetrated on calves to make their flesh white, for the gratification of the eater's eyes, and for an increase of tenderness, probably imaginery, in consequence; it is reported that a few butchers have changed their practice. But this is only one of the atrocities ever at work against the helpless beings who are placed at our mercy. Man, says Thompson, ought to be the lord, but not the tyrant of the world.

Can we now trace the *causes* of this lamentable conduct? *Why* is Christendom worse in this matter than Turkey or India? In so far as the Eastern countries are better, it is because their religious sentiment shelters animals. A Turk (for instance) will not kill a wild creature for mere sport. He says, "God gave it life: I will not take from it what I cannot give." If the animal is dangerous, or is needed for food or clothing, he has no scruple against killing it; but even to drown a kitten, lest cats be too numerous, he disapproves. This scruple inconveniently fills Turkish towns with wild and famished cats, but not the less exhibits to us the zeal and sincere difference of Mussulman sentiment from ours. Birds, it is said, are permitted to take their share of cargoes of corn on the Nile by Mohammedan owners, who think it impious to drive them away. If this be a superstition, it is more amiable than our practice, nor must we make sure that it is a very costly sentiment. The late eccentric Charles Waterton, who would not allow a gun to be fired on his estate, and made friends of all the birds, falsified the predictions of his neighbors by the excellence of his crops. It is now recognized that birds are very serviceable to the cultivator by the destruction of grubs, and as Mohammedans do not kill small hawks and weasels any more than sparrows, these predatory species keep the balance of Nature in the fields. If man leaves the butchering to those tribes to whom it is natural,—who do it more effectually and with less cruelty than he can,—he gains in tenderness of sentiment towards the humbler creatures. Christendom seems in this matter to fall below the Eastern nations, *through want of reverence for brute life*. Ancient men, in civilized countries, made it a part of religion to take no animal life without recognition of God as its source. Slaughter was turned into sacrifice. Though plentiful superstition encrusted the primitive idea, a reverence for brute life was in some nations retained in connection with it.

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with it.

If, leaving off to compare one religion with another, we ask, What chiefly perpetuates cruelty to animals, and hinders the attempt to fix any ideas as to their *rights*?—we must probably answer, The belief that their lives may at any time be taken for our small convenience. Men assume without debate, without a moment's serious thought, that brutes have no right to life, if their life interfere with our slightest whim. Not only my hunger, or danger of starvation, but the needless gratification of my palate, passes as a sufficient reason for killing a wild bird or beast. The like may be said, not only if I need the hide or the down to save me from perishing by cold, but if I covet its feathers as an ornament, or its horns or tusks for the market. Thus the principle is laid down that its life is of less importance than my emptiest pleasures, and this, even if in killing it I produce wide-spread distress to the living. Amateur butchers are clumsy; much cruelty arises from wounding without killing. Law cannot forbid cruelties in detail, if it allow indiscriminate slaughter. Hearts are hardened by custom, and thus the evil spreads.

Evil it must be called; yet to establish fixed principles that shall guide conduct rightly is no light task. Much combination of earnest minds will be wanted. The Brahmins aspired to a high morality, in refusing to take brute life *at all*; though in self-defence we must be in permanent war with the more powerful carnivora, and with countless tribes of insects. The first step towards a just theory seems to be, a rightful classification of animals into different grades, on which their rights must depend.

1. Animals which have feelings as sensitive as ours have a claim upon us to respect those feelings. All warm-blooded creatures at least are here included. To a philosophic slaveholder, who asks "why he may not flog a black fellow" at pleasure, it is impossible to give any valid answer, which will not equally apply against torturing a horse. Those who have equal animal sensitiveness, whether it be two men, or a man and a horse, stand here on the same footing. And as regards animal slaughter, the inference is, that if you *must* kill a horse (for whatever reason), or if it be a tiger, or a shark that you need to kill, you should kill him as tenderly as you would kill a man, when you believe it right to kill him; that is, you must inflict as little pain as possible. Vivisectors coldly assume that, because a horse is worn out and no longer "worth his feed," and on that account it is resolved to kill him, it is therefore lawful to kill him with torture; such torture, as, if inflicted on a man, would rouse burning indignation in whole nations. The vivisector has to prove that he has any such right over another being, equally sensitive as himself. He will not attempt to establish his right by quoting anything about "cursed Canaan;" and it is hard to see (the Bible failing him) what philosophy can justify him. He *hopes*, forsooth, "to enlarge the boundaries of science by it," and "possibly to abate future human suffering." It is well to add *possibly*; but this is a very infirm justification of deliberate torture.

We need not be entangled in Brahminical scruples

concerning insects and animals of low organization. A sphinx moth, when its stomach was cut out, killed and devoured other insects. A crab, when its claw is wounded, kicks it off, and hops without it, until another claw has grown. Such animals have certainly so little sensitiveness that when their destruction is necessary, the mode of it is generally quite unimportant. Not so, to kill rats or pheasants by poison. Each of these practices is reprobated as dangerous to man; but besides, it is cruel to the animals.

2. We have also to consider what secondary mischief we cause; as, if we wound three, in order to kill and catch one. Again, when animals have sensitive moral affections or an intelligent sense of danger, shall our philosophy justify wounding the heart of a mother by slaughter of her offspring, in order merely to gratify our palate, when we have other food in plenty? Or will it justify driving thousands from their accustomed haunts into distant and less desirable abodes, because it is our easiest mode of immediately getting blubber or tongues? These are questions for New Morals to study and solve. An English gentleman, Mr. John Smith of Malton, who has written a classical work on *Fruits and Farinacea the Proper Food of Man*, narrates in it what befell him as the result of a paper read before a literary society on the phenomena of sensation. It led him to inquire: "Is man justified in slaughtering animals for his food, seeing that they [or many of them] are exquisitely sensible of pleasure and pain?" His reply was, that only *real necessity* can justify it; *i.e.* if the welfare of the superior and nobler life can only be maintained by the sacrifice of the lower. Further investigation convinced him that a diet which does *not* sacrifice animal life is even better for man than a diet on flesh or mixed with flesh. That is an inquiry involving numerous questions of fact. But moral philosophy has to deal with the principle, whether mere convenience or the pleasure of the palate, without any real necessity, gives us a right to kill creatures, organized as sensitively as ourselves, enjoying life and suffering in death.

3. The question of *relation* to man here opens upon us. A sportsman of kindly nature is apt to provide for the comfortable old age of a horse that has long carried him, and would be grieved to sell such an animal to a poor master for mean work and miserable treatment. Poverty may force consent; but a certain gratitude is felt for old and faithful service; still more, where there is personal affection, as in a dog. But where there is no personal relation, it would seem that our rights over animal life are increased by a certain domesticity. If by defending sheep we cause their numbers to increase, our right to take the lives which would not have existed without our care appears greater than in the case of wild animals wholly independent of us. Let this be thrown out for fuller debate. It is not expedient to prolong this paper. Its object has been to excite thought on a large topic which has never yet had due attention in any system of Christian morals, or in any large Christian society.