

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Vicarious Suffering.

OUR SANCTIONS FOR
CRUELTY.

BY

SALADIN.

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EDITED BY

SALADIN.

* * Under name and pen-name, some of the most scholarly and able writers of the age contribute regularly to THE AGNOSTIC JOURNAL ; and, although the Editorial policy is opposed to the popular and dominant faith, the columns of the journal are ever open to articles in defence of Christianity from clergymen or lay Christians of recognized ability, while considerable space is devoted to the investigation of Theosophy, Spiritualism, Mysticism, etc.

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VICARIOUS SUFFERING.

“MAN’S inhumanity to man” is the blight and canker and bane of human life. In recent decades human ingenuity has been, in part, directed to such benignant inventions as the steam-engine and the electric telegraph and telephone. But, anterior to those decades, for century upon century, man’s mechanical ingenuity was principally directed to the production of instruments of torture, to contrivances which applied to those mystic harp-strings, the human nerves, could evoke every note in the gamut of agony.

In the Ages of Faith, in the ages in which the Church which claimed, and still claims, to be of Christ was supreme, we had no telescope, no gas-light, no railway, no printing-press ; but we had the rack, the wheel, the boots, the thumb-screw, the witch’s bridle, the Iron Virgin, and other torture-engines too numerous and devilish to be catalogued here. In our museums you can still behold preserved specimens of these mechanical horrors. The sight of them makes *me* shudder : then, what effect must their hellish spectacle of rust and horror have upon *you*, O Orthodoxist, when you remember that it was almost exclusively in the service of the Church that that rack tore human joints out of their sockets, that the boots there

held the leg of a human being till blood from the ruptured veins and marrow from the shattered bone splashed in the face of him who, with swinging hammer, drove home the merciless wedges? Here is heresy, some incomprehensibly subtle doctrinal distinction contemned: then, tighten the wedges, apply the hammer; as weighed against the crime of heresy how trifling are blood and marrow and anguish and agony!

Were grimly fanatical believers culpably inconsistent with their creed in thus mangling their fellow human beings? Did not the Lord, at the very outset of his career with man, shew that he preferred the red blood of the veins to the red flush of the rose? Did he not prefer the fat of Abel's veal to the fragrance of Cain's violets?

CAIN: Poor Abel! he was but a shepherd boy,
 Who offered up the firstlings of his flocks
 In order to appease Jehovah's wrath,
 Who revelled in the pangs and dying groans
 Of the poor beasts who never did him wrong.
 My heart revolted at the cruel sport. 'Twas I
 Refused to torture gentle innocents,
 But, taking fruit, I offered it to Him,
 Altho' 'twas mock'ry, seeing *all* was His.

SPIRIT: Fruit would not do. The Lord has ordered blood.

CAIN: My brother, as a shepherd, offered lambs,
 And I, as husbandman, did offer fruit.

Methought the offering of one's toil is best acceptable.

SPIRIT: Blood, dying pangs, the torture of the innocent,
 Alone appeases the Almighty's wrath.

CAIN: Ay! to the shame of all created things,
 Thou speakest true—He loveth blood!*

Did not the entire wheel of the Christians' faith turn upon the pivot of blood and suffering? Was not the man-god in whom they believed nailed, hand and foot, to the bitter cross? Painters, poets, theologians and historians, have testified to the pain and ignomy of crucifixion. It was not

* Lady Florence Dixie, in "Abel Avenged," in Part II. of "The Songs of a Child."

mere execution, as we now understand the word ; it was studied torture. In being nailed, or lashed, to the cross, no vital organ of the victim was affected. Crucifixion was, with hellish ingenuity, designed to elicit and stimulate all the suffering of which the nerves of the culprit were capable, even to the last spasm and writhe of anguish and agony. A strong culprit has been known to hang on the cross for several days, before exposure to the sun, hunger, slow hæmorrhage and fiery thirst brought death in merciful relief.

And this is the revolting and horrible torture to which the Church deliberately and dogmatically subjected her man-deity. Lest the horror upon which her very existence rested should be overlooked or forgotten, crucifixes with a tortured and nude human figure nailed thereto were exhibited everywhere, in wood, in stone, on canvas. And, as if this were not enough of the cruel and the horrible, the twelve "Stations of the Cross," each more shudderingly revolting than the other, were invented and forced, in all their repellent gruesomeness, upon the wild and sanguinary imagination of an unlettered public. Blood! Blood! Blood everywhere! "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, there is no life in you."

This horrible dithyramb with the refrain of "Blood" only too truculently commended itself to the fierce races in the fields of Christian mission. Blood, not brain. Brain was crude, credulous and inchoate, and applied its raw rapacity to blood and the merciless shedding thereof. Zealots, bigots, their god had been tortured, and they, not incoherently, took to inventing instruments "for His name's sake." Habituation to the idea of crucifixion—"and, being in agony, He prayed more earnestly, and the sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling

down to the ground"—hardened all the more gentle and tender humanitarian instincts, as daily contemplation of cruel and morbid topics inevitably will. And, here, in London, only a few years ago, we had, on exhibition, a collection of torture-engines by which, through dark and bloody ages, on the scaffold and in the dungeon, the Gospel had been protected in its purity against the taint of heresy.

Perdition to the church that required such engines to protect her against heresy! Now, on every side, she is assailed by heresy—nay, by blank unbelief; and this contumacious journal is, every week, hurled in her teeth in defiant scorn. Yet who will say that, in spite of this, the world is not better than it was at the time when this serial would have been in the flames and its editor on the rack?

Blood! Blood! "There is a fountain filled with blood." Well, disinfect the abhorrent nuisance and fill it up with rubble: scatter over it a layer of rich and generous mould; there let the wholesome green grass wave round the rathe roses of Reason and the white lilies of Peace. Can it be wondered at that this habituation to the conception of the sanguinary and horrible has rendered Christianity the bloodiest agency that has ever cursed the earth with its presence? I fearlessly appeal to history in corroboration of my averment. "I come not to bring peace, but a sword," is a dictum put into the mouth of the clumsily-invented myth from whom the faith of the vulgar takes its name. Yes, and, by Heaven, the sword came, and came to stay; and with it came ignorance and superstition and bigotry, and cruelty and rancour and hate. "The Lamb of the Great Sacrifice" was hoisted on the back of The Ass of the Great Credulity, and the Dark Ages was the result, and the darkness of the Dark Ages flings its penumbra upon the vaunted illumination of to-day to a degree that he who looks upon Society conventionally little suspects.

Not only did the "glad tidings of great joy"—O mordant irony!—tend to the reckless and merciless waste of life; but, by a far hotter and more real hell than any previous faith had known, it lent new terrors to death. Never, before Christianity was devised, was it discovered that there was any sting in death worth speaking of. Ask the death-bed memories of certain sincere Christians of the type of John Bunyan and William Cowper, in their raving terror, how Christianity takes away the sting from death; and, if I, like them, were a Christian, I feel certain that my death-bed would be as shudderingly terrible as was theirs. There are, I know, many Christians who feel quite sure that they will "fall asleep in Jesus," and who console themselves by repeating maudlin, nauseous, and meaningless Gospel tags. They know that the vast majority of human kind go to perdition, but they have the despicable self-conceit to believe that *they* have been selected from that overwhelming majority, that *they* are members of that select few, that mere handful, the elect, that *they* have "found Jesus," that *they* have been "washed in the blood of the Lamb," and much else of canting commonplace. And, in their selfish meanness, they feel idiotically happy—although, practically, the whole of the rest of the world is to be lost. And only by this intensely selfish and self-conceited imbecility does Christianity "take away the sting from death." Plato knew how to die, ignorant of this sting-extracting process; and so did Socrates, so did Cato, so did Epaminondas, so did Cocles, so did Cæsar, so did Julian.

He who mercilessly drowned a multitude of swine, after, in his superstitious ignorance, he deemed he had put devils into them, cannot be cited as a zoophilist. Buddha and Mahomet alike insisted upon kindness to the "lower" animals; but where did Jesus utter one word that can be quoted enjoining upon us kindly treatment

of our poor non-human fellow-mortals? We find attributed to him a number of fatuous utterances like, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"; "I and my father are one"; and "The father is greater than I." But he never once said: "Be merciful to the ass"; "Be kind to the dog"; or "Liberate the slave." And, consistently enough, till this hour, the countries professing the faith that bears his name are by far the cruellest and zoomistic in the world.

Even while I write, in Spain, the most Christian country in Europe, a bull-fight* on a more than ordinarily colossal scale is being arranged, and which will involve reeking slaughters and horrors in which the Mahometan could never participate, and which the Buddhist would rather die than sanction. By far the best organized and numerically strongest section of the Church that bears Christ's name formulates thus, in brutal candour, in "The Catholic Dictionary," published under the imprimatur of Cardinal Vaughan: "The brutes are made for man, who has the same right over them that he has over plants and stones. He may, according to the express permission of God, given to Noe, kill them for his food, and this without strict necessity; it must also be lawful to put them to death or to inflict pain on them for any good or reasonable end, such as the promotion of man's knowledge, health, etc., or even for the purposes of recreation."

There are, however, humanitarians among the Papists, as among the Protestants, men and women nobler than, and unconsciously in revolt against, their creed. For instance, the Christian pietist, Frances Power Cobbe, denounces Vivisection as "to the last degree un-Christian"; and then, by a *tour de force* of the glaring inconsistency to which Christian apologists are driven, she admits:

* See p. 13.

“This abominable sentiment, and all the cruelty to man and brute of which it has been the promoter, remains after twenty centuries of Christianity almost unnoticed by the churches of Christ. No moralist—so far as my small knowledge extends, whether Catholic or Protestant—no father, no schoolman, no casuist of later times, no Protestant preachers, have denounced Cruelty and the Pleasure in Pain with anything approaching to the nature of its moral delinquency.”

Again: “If we really accepted the precept of Love to all and under all conditions as the supreme Divine Law, should we not regard the sin of positively torturing and taking pleasure in the sight of torture as the very last and worst of offences? Should not the early Christian teachers, when they mapped out the Seven Deadly Sins, have placed Cruelty the very first on the list? What were they doing, and what has the Church of Rome been doing ever since, to tell us that Sloth, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Envy, Pride, and even Gluttony are mortal sins, and say not one word about Cruelty to man or beast?”

Again: “Even our own English minds (through whole regions of which the old Roman theology and morals still unconsciously dribble) rarely take in the idea that the supreme Vice is Cruelty, that while all other vices degrade man to the level of the beast, Cruelty sinks him to that of the fiend. When we speak of Vice commonly, we think of sexual vice or intemperance. We do not think of that Vice of which—so it seems to me—we must, if guilty, repent through all the cycles of our immortality.”* Yes, Miss Cobbe, and to this Vice of all the vices that “most holy religion” of yours is not appreciably opposed, in either theory or practice!

That truculent Romish dictum I have quoted gives full warranty, not only to hunting our fellow-mortals to

* *Contemporary Review*, May, 1902.

death for "sport," but gives sanction to the hideous horrors exposed in a brochure* which I have glanced at and closed with a shudder. Jesus was crucified to secure our spiritual, and now, consistently enough with that immoral and revolting proposition, dogs and cats and rabbits and guinea-pigs are being vivisected to secure our physical well-being. In the name of Mercy, who and what are we that both god and dog should suffer and die for us? I who, till recently, was endowed with far above the normal strength and agility, and could leap a five-bar gate, was wont to feel more proud of the feat than that of writing an "At Random"; but I have now, through a nerve-malady, to move cautiously, and not over steadily, along by the aid of a staff. Yet, even were the torture of the mouse, exhibited in figure 447, to disclose the neurotic secret that would again make me a swift-footed Achilles, I should, unscathed, set the "wee bit creepin', timorous beastie" free. What right have I to make his impotency my potency, to make his woe my weal?

In Figure 503*b*, these Christian vivisectionists have actually stuck up a rabbit with a nail through each foot and in an attitude grimly suggestive of their man-god upon the cross. The brutal burlesque is theirs, not mine. But in the figures on page 158, the cat, my favourite among all the animals, is exposed in three attitudes of vivisectional agony. I finish this at "the wee short hour ayont the twal," and go to bed to pass a sleepless night. Visions of my lost friend, the "Prodigal

* Catalogue of apparatus and appliances for experiments with animals, issued by F. and M. Lautenschlager, Berlin. Translated into English by Paul Grünfeld, who was nominated at the request of the National Anti-Vivisection Society, by the librarian of the British Museum. The illustrations, which have been reproduced by photographic zinc-etching, are fac-similes of the originals, and have been placed beside the letterpress as they appear in the original catalogue. Second Edition.—Twentieth Thousand. Printed for The National Anti-Vivisection Society, 92, Victoria Street, London.

Son," will pass before me, between my closed but sleepless eyes and heaven's dome filled with the awful stars. His remains lie affectionately interred in the small plot of garden behind my home in London, and a giant Scots thistle from Galloway keeps vigil over his grave.

My ever tenderly remembered "Prodigal Son," who was young and happy, and to whom life was dear, yet died like a philosopher. I feel convinced that he knew he was dying; but he died like a hero. He knew he was dying; but he knew nothing about the sting having been taken from death by the reputed sacrifice of an old-time carpenter; he did not know that death had ever had any special sting. As I nursed him, he only looked up with a deep and tender mournfulness into my tearful eyes. I have among "my puir earth-born companions and fellow mortals," had pet pigs, pet bullocks, pet horses, pet rats, pet sheep, pet crows and pet owls. I never had the self-conceit to feel myself so superior to any of them that I presumed to regard them as subordinates; I regarded them as friends, and (I wish I could say the same of the human animal) not one of them ever betrayed me.

I read inexpressible volumes of pathos in the countenance of my expiring feline friend. His teeth, which he had often used upon me playfully, were visible between his parted lips, as he panted for laborious breath. And, as he cast upon me his last look, there was an eloquence therein which can never be expressed in any weak words of mine. It meant: "Dearest friend, Saladin, my poor green eyes, of which you were the delight, are closing. I am in pain. It is growing dark. My one regret is, I shall see you no more."

I am aware that what I here express is only the emotionalism of an intense zoophilist who sometimes feels inclined to doubt that "the lower animals" are the lower animals at all, it being difficult to get lower than the

average J. Smith, and impossible to get lower than the lowest J. Smith.

If, in the awful arcanum of inexorable Fate, I cannot have my soul saved without a tortured Christ, or my body cured without a vivisected Cat, let soul and body perish. I am not without egoistic self-esteem; but I have also moral self-respect, and this latter revolts at my accepting of weal at the cost of another's woe. Barbaric conception of pristine savages! If my soul cannot be saved without another's blood and agony—Let it be lost. Doom, I face thee and whatever thou mayest have in reserve for me; and I decline to escape my weird through the anguish of a Christ on the Cross, or, through its natural sequence, the agony of a Cat on the "Operation Board." God, whom I cannot formulate in thought, but whom I meet in ecstatic vision, THOU wilt not permit me to be lost because I decline to accept of a cruel coward's method of being saved.

Faith and Insanity = partners

A CHRISTIAN HOLIDAY.*

THE hold the ring has on Spain is enormous. There are four weekly journals in Madrid devoted solely to the interests and literature of the bull-ring. There are dozens of books written on the subject, and on every day of a fight Madrid is simply painted green with copies of the "Programa de Espectaculos," a four-page sheet sold for a penny by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hawkers.

This gives pictures of the bulls to be slaughtered on the day in question, their pedigrees and owners and short histories of the animals, together with the names of all the performers in the day's spectacle. About an hour before the time for the show to begin the picadores, dressed in their clumsy but picturesque costume, set out from their hotel in the Puerta del Sol for the Plaza de Toros, about a mile away.

These gentry are mounted on fine horses, not the sorry hacks they use in the ring, and are followed by immense crowds of admiring men, women, and children, who consider it an honour to be near the heroes.

At this time of the year the spectacle begins at about four, earlier or later, according to the number of animals to be killed. The scene for a couple of hours before this time beggars description. A sense of furious struggle, wild desire, fierce eagerness hangs over the city—comes pouring down with the rays of the hot sun, rises with the dust from the suffocating streets, gets into the blood of every Madrilenos, and compels him or her—for women go to bull-fights in their thousands—to make a mad rush for the place of slaughter.

Even if he cannot afford to enter the show—and it is an old saying that a Spaniard will sell his shirt to go

* *Daily Express*, May 21st, 1902.

to a bull-fight—to be near the ring is something. Perhaps he may hear a wounded bull bellow with rage or a dying horse scream in his agony, and he is certain to see the chief actors come or go.

Private carriages, with well-dressed men and daintily-clad women, electric trams succeeding each other with amazing rapidity, each laden to the full with sweltering humanity (or inhumanity), horse and mule trams that use no rails, but clatter madly over the cobbles, extra omnibuses, and open cars drawn by five, six, or eight red-tasselled mules, all dash at full gallop for the Plaza de Toros to turn out their loads and tear back for more.

As the time grows short they come only part of the way back and turn at the half-way mark to hurry on belated stragglers. It is not gay, it is feverish, exciting, bewildering. Men's faces are set and keen. There is no badinage or merriment, even if it were possible, while thundering over the ill-paved streets. The one idea is to get to the fight quickly. Anger is swift to the surface, drivers are urged and sworn at, and woe be to the wretched horse or mule that stumbles. He is greeted with a shower of curses from roof and window of the vehicle and flogged unmercifully by his driver.

If anyone is of opinion that bull-fighting does not brutalize these people, let him watch the crowd that goes to the Plaza de Toros any Sunday in Madrid. He need not go inside the amphitheatre—he will see enough outside to change his mind.

We are having fights nearly every day just at present. I went to Thursday's contest, and saw six bulls and fifteen horses slaughtered. I was disgusted and bored, and came away simply worn out, not with excitement, but with a sinking stomach and fluttering heart. My first feeling was that of anger at the men in the ring for brutally sacrificing the poor horse, who, with his bandaged eye on to the side towards the bull, was made to receive broadside the cruel horns of the maddened and worried brute. The result was sickening. The horse was ripped open, and amidst screams of pain he was forced to stand again with his entrails dragging on the sand of the arena. Every step he took he trod on

his entrails, but was not allowed to lie down and die until he could no longer bear the burden of the picador, who urged him forward as long as possible with spurs while his servant slashed the dying brute over the head with a stick.

I do not intend to describe the fight; you would probably not publish the revolting details if I did. I merely give one instance which was multiplied over a dozen time with variations more loathing and gory as the insistent crowd's lust for blood grew with what it fed upon. Finally, the bull, his fore part a crimson flood, spirit exhausted, an easy victim for the cowards who were torturing him, was put out of his misery by the matador. For three hours this went on until the six bulls had been dragged out dead by mules.

Bull-fighting is a cruel, soul-debasing sight. Men, women, and children must become brutalised—made callous to suffering and pain. It must and does stamp the character of the people who love it, and degrade them. Many Spaniards will tell you that they do not care for it, and never go. They wish to have the "sport" stopped, but they are few compared to the millions here who would cause civil war rather than their favourite pastime should be abolished. In some parts of the United States the law does not permit a butcher to sit on a jury trying a prisoner for capital crime, because he is supposed to be accustomed to the sight of blood. If such a law were in force here it would be hard to obtain a jury in Madrid, where nearly everyone is a butcher, by proxy at least.

After witnessing a bull-fight it is easy to understand Spanish cruelty in Cuba and elsewhere, and to realise that it was in this Spain that the Inquisition originated. You may see to-day in Madrid the square, Plaza Mayor, where thousands of persons were tortured and burned to death to the great delight of the spectators crowding the balconies about the four sides of the square. It has changed but little in appearance, except that the instruments of torture have been removed a little further away to the Plaza de Toros.

There are many laws in Spain regulating bull-fighting, mostly in favour of the institution. As an example of its

legality, I may merely point out that should all the horses available be killed at a corrida the law allows the managers of the rings to go into the public streets and commandeer the first horses at hand, paying for them, of course. There are more than two hundred and fifty bull-rings in Spain, About five hundred fights are held every year, in which one thousand five hundred bulls and six thousand horses are killed. These are average figures. It is impossible to get any reliable figures of the expense of this national institution, but it must be very large. Matadors of first rank make sometimes from £10,000 to £15,000 a year, and everybody finds money for the bull-fight, though schools suffer in this country, where about fifty per cent. of the people are illiterate.

