

Vivisection

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Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 3

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

[THE Theosophical Publishing Services has been requested by a member of The Anti Vivisection Society to insert the following articles in "Theosophical Siftings". The T. P. S. is pleased to be able to afford a wider scope for the untiring efforts of these lovers of the defenceless brute creation. As this subject is also of great interest to many Theosophists, the T. P. S. sincerely hopes that they will give their sympathetic approval]

The following is an attempt to give a short account of Vivisection in England. It is a sad task, for one unavoidably reverts to former days, when our people, as a nation, shuddered at the whispered rumours of Majendie's atrocities in France, and we, alas ! perhaps plumed ourselves upon our superiority to our neighbours. A speech in the House of Commons of Mr, Martin, M.P. for Galway, February 24th, 1825, describing one of Majendie's experiments, too horrible to copy, was received with cries of " Shame ! "and manifestations of great disgust. About the same time Dr. John Reid, of Edinburgh and St. Andrews, pursued a similar course of long protracted unmitigated tortures, but mark this, it was done secretly, shyly, conscience did not then speak, but he knew that the best men in Scotland, and also the general public voice, would condemn the practices and shun the perpetrator. How changed is Scotland now; yet still there are in it hearts and voices which protest unceasingly against what is now unblushingly avowed, and, protected by license, done with full impunity.

One cheering thing I must thankfully record, [Life of Dr. John Reid, by George Wilson, M.D.] Dr. Reid's deep heartfelt repentance. The warning came through long-continued agonies in the same tongue-nerve upon which he had specially operated, and this, he owned, was not for expected relief of human sufferings; the motive always being scientific fame. His full and sorrowful confession must lead us to deep pity and thankfulness for such a change of heart, would that it might prove a salutary warning. The discovery of chloroform, etc., gave rise to illusory hopes, but hear what Dr. George Hoggan says: "I am inclined to look upon anaesthetics as the greatest curse to vivisectible animals. . . . They indeed prove far more efficacious in lulling the public feeling towards the vivisector than pain for the vivisected". Dr. Hoggan also refers to curari, which paralyzes voluntary motion and heightens sensation. We well know this now, we also know how innumerable are the experiments depending on the actual pain caused by them. [Page 4]

Let us turn to the brighter side and the efforts made to resist these atrocities when creeping in to our hospitals and medical schools. In 1870, at the meeting of the British Association at Liverpool, resolutions in the biological section were drawn up minimizing experiments to a great degree.

Of course these well-intended resolutions possessed no legal authority, the sorrowful comment is shown by the 1874-5 Reports of Experiments in our London University College, Guy's Hospital, and Westminster Hospital Medical School, this latter adds, "Gentlemen will themselves perform the experiments so far as opportunities permit".

The disgusting Norwich experiments, conducted by Dr. Magnan, upon two dogs, by the injection of absinthe and alcohol in 1874, and the subsequent trial, aroused the public at last, and the result was the Royal Commission in 1875 —1876, where the friends of animals had small chance of an impartial hearing. Its results was the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876. This, when introduced by Lord Carnarvon into the House of Lords was a far more satisfactory measure than after its changes in the House of Commons, where the Medical Profession proved too strong for Ministers.

The Bill was, and is in itself, stringent, but the exceptional clauses obtained completely cancel each safeguard in succession. The Bill now only serves to mislead the public. Probably no Act for Restriction could have prevented evasions, this one is utterly futile, it has an Inspector, himself a vivisector, who simply receives and transmits the statements of the operating Vivisectioners themselves, they of course, report the smallest possible amount of suffering in all their experiments.

Meanwhile the London Anti-Vivisection Society, after much private effort in the same cause, had been inaugurated in June, 1876, on the ground of the entire Prohibition of Vivisection.

This, the earliest London Society, was quickly followed by the International Society for the same object. At that time many humane persons flattered themselves that Government measures, sooner or later, would do all that was needful. Thus the Victoria Street Society "for the Protection of Animals" acted, doing their best for poor animals whilst waiting for amendments which never arrived. This position became at last unbearable, and at a meeting in August, 1878, under the presidency of the late honoured Earl of Shaftesbury, the principle and the resolution of the Total Prohibition of Vivisection was proposed and carried. After a time the International joined the Victoria Society on this firm common ground, common alike to them and to the London Society. All can now work with redoubled zeal in the same noble cause. It is very encouraging [Page 5] likewise to remark that in the United States similar results have followed. The friends of Animals began there with efforts to restrict vivisection. They came very soon to the English and Scotch conclusion, *viz.*, that the one only safe reliable standpoint for the protectors of dumb helpless creatures is the Prohibition of Vivisection, for this they continually work; they can be content with no less.

I must not trespass on more space, or it would be easy to show the danger of small beginnings, the impossibility of real safeguards, and the moral, as well as physical evils arising from this sinful practice, from which we desire to keep our own nation, and to utter a voice of kindly warning to every land, distant or near.