

From the N. Y. Mirror.

PAIN OF LIVING CREATURES.

"The poor beetle that we tread upon,
In corporal suffering, feels a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

This opinion of the celebrated poet has been so frequently quoted, as to be familiar to all the reading classes of the community. It evidently sprang from that thoughtful study of nature which is the great parent of benevolence, and does honor to the writer's heart. yet, like many beautiful theories, both in prose and poetry, I do not believe it to be founded in fact. In youth, when the mind is more curious to inquire and more ready to believe than to reason, we receive instruction with a general credulity, and without ever pausing to examine into its origin. Impressions so made are confirmed by time, which deepens the prejudices which it fails to destroy. I esteem this to be one, among other errors, of a more serious kind, which the world fall into, as it were blind-folded; and in which they are contented to grope, when by merely excorciating the senses with which nature has endowed them, they might detect the path of truth.

Let my readers reflect for a moment, upon the acknowledgment which they make, by endorsing, with their approbation, the remark of the poet:

"The poor beetle, that we tread upon,
In corporal suffering, feels a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

In naming "the poor beetle," I presume the writer means to include all living creatures on the face of the globe, or beneath the ground, or in the deep, or the air. The mass of agony for which this admission makes nature responsible, is shocking, and beyond credit. The death of every creature which supplies our table with food, would, in such case, be a massacre, and we should shrink from an oyster supper with horror unutterable.—What appetite should we derive from witnessing a human being placed upon the rack, his limbs torn quivering and bleeding from his body, his eyes wrenched from their sockets, his heart cut out from his panting breast, or his head twisted off before life had left the mangled trunk; and yet, if those forms of life which are evidently intended to serve the purposes of nutrition to human beings,

"In corporal suffering, feel a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

even such is the exquisite torture inflicted upon every oyster that is eaten, upon every fish that is brought up trembling from the depths of the stream, and every bird which falls fluttering and bloody at the fowler's feet.

Besides the creatures which are useful as the food of man, there are myriads of others which swarm about his steps, and die in countless numbers by accident—while others are intentionally destroyed as offensive. If death is to all these what it is to a human being, it would be no satisfaction of sensibility to confess that I

could not put my foot on a spider, nor witness the struggles of a drowning fly, without a thrill of painful compassion.

I have no doubt that all creatures gifted with life, are, also, endowed with a sufficient susceptibility of pain, and instinctive dread of it, to answer the general purpose of self-preservation; but, when we behold the difference between the organization of an oyster, a fly, or a beetle and a man, it is impossible to conceive that their systems can admit of an equal degree either of pain or pleasure. Both sensations must be to them dull and vague; and inasmuch as their sphere of existence is more contracted, and their formation meager, so their capacities are all dim and small, and their lives comparatively worthless. You may watch a fly upon the table, perambulating briskly in search for food. True, if you catch him he makes a great noise, although uninjured; but set him free again, and after convincing himself by a few aerial circumvolutions of the fact that so important a personage is actually released without a ransom, he will return to the table and go on with his epicurean researches. Cut off his legs, and his wings, and sometimes I have seen his body rather unceremoniously divided for the sake of experiment. The patient was incommode by the loss, and performed certain involuntary evolutions, but presently, on arriving at a crumb of sugar, he commenced regulating himself as usual, body or no body, and afterwards cleansed the remainder of his wings with the fragments of his legs, and hobbled off till he found and partook of some more sugar.

The fisherman takes the worm from the earth, tears his helpless form into pieces; each one of which he fastens upon the barbed hook. The imagination recoils from the idea of such an experiment upon one of our race, yet if similar pain be suffered by the worm, it is equally cruel. Fish taken from the water remain alive many hours. If we suppose them gifted with a human susceptibility of bodily torture, what agony can be more excruciating than theirs?

The destruction which we necessarily commit among the inferior creation, although presenting a vast and gloomy picture of suffering, would form but a part of the great system of anguish offered to the contemplation of the naturalist. He beholds all the brute creation continually engaged, from their nature, in destroying each other. The lion is tearing his victim; the vulture is pouncing upon his prey; the whale is swallowing shoals of lesser fish—altogether, the earth would afford a prospect painful to dwell upon, and inconsistent with the principles of benevolence which form the leading features in the creation and government of the world. I am, therefore compelled to believe, that although the creatures over which man is the lord, are capable of sufferings to a certain degree, yet, that their pain is very different from the torture of human beings. The essence, which we call life, might have been breathed into

matter much finer and purer, and more capable of every species of emotion, than that of which we are at present constituted. The nerves or the tooth for example, how exquisitely delicate, and with what a refined agony do they resent the softest touch? The same power that spread these fibres through the tooth, might have created us *all nerve*, so that the breathing of the air upon our uncovered bodies would have thus afflicted us, or perhaps overcome us with an equal consciousness of delight. The nerves which in us are productive of such acute sensations, are wanting in the fly, the oyster, the beetle, &c. or are composed of a different material, and we may, therefore, justly conclude are governed by different rules. The more nature is studied, the more the harsh and gloomy features in her aspect is softened down into kindness and beauty; and however painful insects may find the act by which their lives are extinguished, I must differ in opinion from the author of the lines at the head of this article. Beasts are as incapable of our sufferings as they are of our enjoyments.

SKETCH.

I came to a little village. I sat down by the fountain where I had sat in childhood. The wind whistled in bleak murmurs through the grove, and my heart was sad! I drank of the water of its fountains; but its sweetness was flown and the stealing tear dropped from my dim eye. I beheld a maiden—she was lovely—but I could not be glad.—Where (said I) is Mary of the dark and smiling eye! she who once glided through these valleys? She was fair. Dark was her hair as the plumage upon the raven's wing, and floated on the morning breeze, as yon wild waving trees nod to the winds." "Mary was fair, (said the maiden) but she sleeps beneath yon silent mound, where the dark grass waves. Ten autumn winds have scattered the promise of fair Spring upon her tomb. The cypress shades the place of her rest—but she went to the earth alone; no kind hand scattered flowers upon her lonely bed. Her lover went forth to the war, and she faded in death. His name appeared first and brightest among the warriors of his country—he toiled in the battle front and was dear to his kinsmen—his name was dreaded by his foes—but she was at rest! The clarion of war sounded victory—he left the clamour of battle and came to the grove where they pledged their vows.