

VII. *The Happiness of Organic Life.*

All organized nature may be divided into stationary organizations, and locomotive organizations; the former of which are called vegetables, and the latter animals. All those parts of vegetables, which are most nutritious to animals, consist, as observed above, of aliment secreted from the vegetable blood, and laid up in reservoirs for the future sustenance of their embryo or infant progeny; which reservoirs are plundered by locomotive animals, and devoured along with the progeny, they were designed to support! add to this, that the stronger locomotive animals devour the weaker ones without mercy. Such is the condition of organic nature! whose first law might be expressed in the words, "Eat or be eaten!" and which would seem to be one great slaughter-house, one universal scene of rapacity and injustice!

1. Where shall we find a benevolent idea to console us amid so much apparent misery?—I hope the sympathizing reader will not think the following account of the happiness, which organized beings acquire from irritation only, impertinently inserted in this place; their happiness derived from imagination and volition may be treated of in some future work.

It may first be observed, that the seeds of plants and the eggs of animals, when they have left the pericarp or uterus, and have not yet commenced their new growth upon the soil, or beneath the wings of the mother, exist in a torpid state, not possessed of sensitive life; and cannot therefore at this time be supposed to suffer pain, when they are destroyed by other animals; though those animals obtain pleasure from the activity, into which their vascular systems are excited by the stimulus of the aliment thus supplied.

Secondly, that the young of lactescent animals both acquire and communicate pleasure to the enamoured mother, from whom they receive

receive their nutriment, as mentioned in *Botanic Garden*, Vol. I. Canto I. l. 278, note; which constitutes the most beautiful and most benevolent part of the great system of nature.

Thirdly, all animals, and, I suppose, vegetables, receive pleasure in the reproduction of their species; and where seeds are dispersed on the soil, and the eggs of some animals and of many insects are buried beneath it, to be revived and hatched by the warmth of the sun; there can be no pain in these cases inflicted on the mother, when they are destroyed by animals or by insects, as she is unconscious of their destruction.

Fourthly, as all animal existence must perish in process of time, by the inirritability and consequent debility occasioned by the repetition of stimulus, which is termed habit, and appears to be an universal law of nature: it is so ordered, that as soon as any organized being becomes less irritable and less sensible, and in consequence feeble or sickly, that it is destroyed and eaten by other more irritable and more sensible, and in consequence more vigorous organized beings; as insects attack the weaker vegetable productions in preference to the healthy ones; and beasts of prey more easily catch and conquer the aged and infirm, and the young ones are defended by their parents. By this contrivance more pleasureable sensation exists in the world, as the organized matter is taken from a state of less irritability and less sensibility, and converted into a state of greater; that is in other words, that the old organizations, whether stationary or locomotive ones, are transmigrated into young ones: whence it happened, that before mankind introduced rational society, and conquered the savage world, old age was unknown on earth!

Finally, the aged and infirm, from their present state of inirritability and insensibility, lose their lives with less pain, and which ceases instantly with the stroke of death; inasmuch that death cannot so properly be called positive evil, as the termination of good.

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To this should be added, that a long continued or a great excess of pain cannot afflict an organized being; as syncope or sudden death, and consequent decomposition, attends very violent pains; and a lingering death attends the continuation of less violent ones. Hence it becomes a consoling circumstance, that misery is not immortal.

A philosopher, whom I left in my library, has perused the above paragraphs, and added the subsequent one to my manuscript. “It consoles me to find, as I contemplate with you the whole of organized nature, that it is not in the power of any one personage, whether statesman or hero, to produce by his ill-employed activity so much misery, as might have been supposed. Thus, if a Russian army, in these insane times, after having endured a laborious march of many hundred miles, is destroyed by a French army in defence of their republic, what has happened? Forty thousand human creatures dragged from their homes and their connexions cease to exist, and have manured the earth; but the quantity of organized matter, of which they were composed, presently revives in the forms of millions of microscopic animals, vegetables, and insects, and afterwards of quadrupeds and men; the sum of whose happiness is perhaps much greater than that of the harassed soldiers, by whose destruction they have gained their existence!—Is not this a consoling idea to a mind of universal sympathy?”

“I well remember to have heard an ingenious agricultor boast, that he had drained two hundred acres of morassy land, on which he now was able to feed a hundred oxen; and added, ‘is not that a meritorious thing?’ ‘True,’ replied one of the company, ‘but you forget, that you have destroyed a thousand free republics of ants, and ten thousand rational frogs, besides innumerable aquatic insects, and aquatic vegetables.’”

“Having written the above, I fear you may think me a misanthrope, but I assure you a contrary sensation dwells in my bosom;

and though I commiserate the evils of all organic being, Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto."

2. The vascular systems of animal bodies are excited into action by the stimulus of the fluids, which they absorb, circulate, and secrete; and when this action is exerted in its natural or most usual quantity, it is attended with agreeable sensation, which constitutes the pleasure of organized existence. These vascular actions of animals, which perform digestion, sanguification, and secretion, convert the aliment, after its solution in the stomach, into more compounded and more solid materials; as into muscles, membranes, nerves, bones, and shells; at the same time that pleasurable sensation attends this activity of the system. The vascular actions of vegetables, which perform their digestion, sanguification, and secretion, convert the elements of air and water, or other aliments, which they receive from organized matter decomposing beneath the soil, into more compounded or more solid materials, as into vegetable vessels, muscles, membranes, nerves, and ligneous fibres; and a degree of pleasurable sensation must be supposed from the strongest analogy to attend this activity of their systems.

3. Many of the materials, which have been thus produced by the digestion and secretion of organized beings, and have given pleasure in their production, have been slow in their decomposition after the death of the creature; as the shells of fish were originally thus formed, and were left at the bottom of the ocean, till they became wonderfully accumulated, were afterwards elevated by submarine fires, and constitute at this day the immense rocks and unmeasured strata of limestone, chalk, and marble. As mentioned in Sect. X. 10. 1.

The strata, which are incumbent on the calcareous ones, which consist of coals, sand, iron, clay, and marl, are all of them believed to have been originally the products chiefly of vegetable organization; whatever changes they have since undergone in the long progress