Behind the scenes in slaughter-houses / by H.F. Lester.

THE

HUMANITARIAN LEAGUE'S PUBLICATIONS

No. 5.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN SLAUGHTER-HOUSES

LONDON:

Wm. Reeves, 185, Fleet Street, E.C.

TWOPENCE.

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No. V.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN SLAUGHTER-HOUSES

BY

H. F. LESTER.

BARRISTER-AT-LAW,

HON. SEC. LONDON MODEL ABATTOIR SOCIETY.

LONDON:

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Manifesto of the Humanitarian League.

THE Humanitarian League has been established in the belief that the promulgation of a high and positive system of morality in the conduct of life, in all its aspects, is one of the greatest needs of the time. It will assert as the basis of that system an intelligible and consistent principle of humaneness, viz.: that it is iniquitous to inflict suffering, directly or indirectly, on any sentient being, except when self-defence or absolute necessity can be justly pleaded—the creed expressed by Wordsworth in his well-known lines,

> "Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."

This principle the Humanitarian League will apply and emphasise in those cases where it appears to be most flagrantly overlooked, and will protest not only against the cruelties inflicted by men on men, in the name of law, authority and conventional usage, but also (in accordance with the same sentiment of humanity) against the wanton ill-treatment of the lower animals.

The Humanitarian League will therefore demand the thorough revision and more equitable administration of the present Criminal Code, under which a very large amount of injustice and oppression is still frequently perpetrated.

It will deprecate the various provocations and incentives to aggressive warfare, and will point to the evils that result from the ever-increasing array of military and naval armaments.

It will insist on the recognition by the community of its primary duty—the protection of the weak and helpless, and will urge the need of amending a condition of society under which a large portion of the people is in a state of chronic destitution.

Furthermore, in view of the increasing evidence of the sufficiency of a non-flesh diet, the Humanitarian League will aim at the prevention of the terrible sufferings to which countless numbers of highly-organised animals are yearly subjected through the habit of flesh-eating, which is directly responsible for the barbarities of the cattle-traffic and the shambles, and will advocate, as an initial measure, the abolition of *private* slaughter-houses, the presence of which in our large centres is admitted to be a cause of widespread demoralisation.

It will contend that the practice of vivisection is incompatible with the fundamental principles both of humanity and sound science, and that the infliction of suffering for ends purely selfish, such as sport, fashion, profit, and professional advancement, is largely instrumental in debasing the general standard of morality.

The Humanitarian League will look to its members to do their utmost, both in private and public, to promote the above-mentioned scheme. Its work will involve no sort of rivalry with that of any existing institution; on the contrary, it is designed to supplement and reinforce such efforts as have already been organised for similar objects. The distinctive purpose and guiding policy of the League will be to consolidate and give consistent expression to those principles of humaneness, the recognition of which is essential to the understanding and realisation of all that is highest and best in Humanity.

Communications to be addressed to the Secretary, 38, Gloucester Road, Regent's Park, London, N.W.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN SLAUGHTER-HOUSES.

"NOTWITHSTANDING the assertion of Dr. Johnson," writes Mr. Lecky, "I venture to maintain that there are multitudes to whom the necessity of discharging the duties of a butcher would be so inexpressibly painful and revolting, that if they could obtain flesh diet on no other condition, they would relinquish it for ever. But to those who are inured to the trade this repugnance has simply ceased. It has no place in their emotions or calculations. Nor can it be reasonably questioned that most men by an assiduous attendance at the slaughter-house could acquire a similar indifference."

In this statement the author of the *History of European Morals* rightly notices, though he probably somewhat exaggerates, the enormous powers of custom to render indifferent an occupation which at first starting is odious and repulsive to the highest degree. We may take it for granted that ordinary human nature shrinks instinctively from shedding the blood of one of the lower animals. This may not be the case with savages, but now-a-days we treat "human nature" as that belonging to the average man in a community removed several steps from mere barbarism. It may with some confidence be affirmed that the average European or Asiatic would rather be excused from the task of providing his own beef or mutton. With persons who have attained to any degree of education or refine-

ment, this natural repugnance is of course vastly increased.

If this is the attitude the mind instinctively takes up towards the act of killing a fellow-creature, it would seem to follow that man is more allied in his instincts to the cow or the horse than to the tiger. The mere smell of blood, as is well known, drives a horse nearly frantic with terror. The combined smell and sight of blood, which at the Deptford abattoir, is allowed to trickle down into gutters through the hoofs of the animals waiting their turn to be slaughtered, produces all the symptoms of panic fear. I have stood and watched splendid American bullocks, with great intelligent eyes, trembling in every limb, panting and gasping in the extremity of their almost human fear outside these Deptford shambles.

Now if the allegation of those who assert man's dependence on a meat diet be correct, the sight and smell of blood ought to be rather pleasing than otherwise to him. The "unseemly savour of a slaughter-house" would rejoice the heart of a tiger; it produces a feeling of oppression and nausea on any human being who enters the building for the first time. We may admit that this fact, taken by itself, does not prove that meat-eating is not the proper and legitimate method for man's bodily nourishment. It only shows that, supposing meat-eating to be required by nature, then nature requires us to perform an act which is distasteful to everybody, and would be positively impossible to men endowed with great refinement of character.

It appears to be quite self-evident that those who indulge in the practice of flesh-eating are morally bound to see that

no cruelty is perpetrated on the dumb animals doomed to slaughter. This obligation is theoretically recognised, though the most prevalent habit is to ignore the slaughter-house altogether, to draw a veil over the operations that go on inside its walls, and to act on the complacent theory that animals don't mind being killed because they taste so nice when they are eaten. But this is surely to treat the slaughter-house in a very unworthy way. As things are at present, it is the basis of natural life, the cradle of manly health and womanly beauty. The physiologist, though with increasing hesitation, builds his throne there. The medical man, whose patients enjoy their mutton-chops, says that mutton-chops are essential to life, and thereby worships at the same delectable shrine. In fact the butcher is the high priest of modern civilization, and it is a mere unfair distribution of the honours and rewards of life which prevent his being recognised as such.

To treat the operative slaughterer, as he is usually treated, as an unclean creature, a pariah of society, may be logical in the Vegetarian, but it is moral cowardice in the meat-eater. The meat-eater accepts the results of this man's demoralisation of character. Pious and professed Christians are content to allow the deep degradation of the nature of a whole class of men, set apart to do the nation's dirty work of slaughtering, without an apparent thought of the baseness of their conduct. But, happily there are among those who eat flesh many whose consciences are touched with the thought of the consequences which the practice entails both on men and animals. These people would

leave off meat-eating to-morrow, were it not that they are told by medical authorities, whose dicta they have never dreamed of doubting, that abstention is only another word for suicide.

All, therefore, that they feel able to do is to interest themselves in efforts to reform the method of killing animals for food adopted in this country; this work, consequently, is finding a daily increasing number of sympathisers in all classes of society.

Now from what I have seen of the practical work of slaughtering, I should feel disposed to controvert Mr. Lecky's statement, that the "repugnance" of butchers to their daily work has "ceased." We must take into consideration the fact that the ranks of slaughter-men are habitually made up from the dregs of the population, persons in whom one could hardly expect to find the sentiment of pity strongly developed; yet, even among these, there is a certain air of dissatisfaction with the work they are compelled to do, and a mixture of insolence and shamefacedness, of swagger and evident dislike of inspection, which makes one think they know their trade is a nasty one, only bearable from lack of other employment and from the good wages earned. But there are plenty of men engaged in this work of killing animals for food who are much too good for the business. These will tell you openly that they dislike the job, but "people will have meat," and if they were to give it up someone else would step into the work. As to the demoralisation consequent on the trade of a slaughterer, it is written

plainly enough on the countenances of the hapless race who inhabit these "Lugentes Campi." At Deptford there is a regulation forbidding bad language and riotous behaviour among the slaughter-men, on pain of expulsion. On market days when the place is crowded with operative slaughterers, retailers of meat, hide-sellers, and others, the regulation becomes a dead letter. The constable in charge humorously remarked—"We should have to expel the whole lot of them."

It may, of course, be urged that the mere fact that the business of slaughtering animals produces, and must of necessity produce, the demoralisation of those engaged in it, is not by itself a sufficient argument against meat-eating. If meat-eating is a necessity for health and strength, then animals must be killed, whatever the consequent suffering to them, and degradation of the unfortunate butcher class. If, on the contrary, meat is not only not necessary, but actually injurious, standing in the same relation to wholesome food as brandy to wholesome drinks, then, directly that is acknowledged, the shambles could at once cease to be used, and could be purified and disinfected, and converted into wholesome receptacles for grains and fruit.

It was the painful duty of the writer of the present paper, in conjunction with another amateur inspector, to undertake, a few years ago, an examination of the London slaughter-houses, both public and private, as well as some provincial "abattoirs." This inspection, as far as London private slaughter-houses are concerned, has been recently repeated. In the Metropolis there are at present about

600 private slaughter-houses, besides the two semi-public ones, belonging to the Corporation of London, at Deptford and Islington.

Formerly these places were subject only to the inspection of the Vestry; now they are liable to be inspected by the officer of the County Council, by the Medical Officer of Health, and by the Privy Council Inspectors for diseased cattle. But as Dr. Tidy, himself a Medical Officer of Health, said, there are so many slaughter-houses in Islington, that it is impossible to keep a man at each to see that all the meat that comes out of them is fit for human food. Thus the existence of these 600 private slaughter-houses in London is a direct encouragement to the trade in diseased meat. Contrast with this state of things the arrangement at the public abattoir at Manchester, where no animal can possibly enter without being supervised by an inspector; and generally it may be affirmed that the only real safe-guard against the sale of flesh which is utterly unfit for human consumption lies in the establishment of large abattoirs, such as exist in many of our large provincial towns, and in most foreign capitals. Even then, however, it appears to be impossible to prevent the killing of tuberculous cattle for human food, and consumption is supposed to be readily transmissible by eating the meat or drinking the milk of such animals. Professor Fleming's evidence tends to show that about at least five per cent. of British cattle are tuberculous.

Besides this terrible danger to which the meat-eater is subjected, owing to the existence of private slaughter-houses,

where the Inspector only occasionally pays a visit, there is also the fact that the meat, as things are managed at present, is allowed to hang to "set" in the same room in which the slaughtering goes on. Thus it is necessarily infected with the reeking gases arising from the killing and dressing of numerous animals in succession. This is the case not only in private places, but even in the great establishments at Deptford and Islington, where we might naturally expect that greater attention would be paid to sanitary matters. These places, however, are under the control of the Corporation, not of the County Council. So crowded are the slaughtering-rooms at Deptford with the carcases of animals hanging to "set," that towards the end of the day the butchers actually have to stoop down to get room to kill! In the interests of the consumer it is most desirable, as long as meat-eating continues, that the processes of killing, of dressing, and of hanging, should all go on in separate apartments. In the public abattoirs at Manchester and Birkenhead, the dressing takes place in one room, and the carcases are left to hang in another: an admirable arrangement, which might with the greatest ease be imitated in London, if the Corporation chose to construct their present ill-planned abattoirs on sanitary and humane principles.

As for the private slaughter-houses of London, the Medical Officer for Kensington, Dr. Dudfield, who has done most valuable work in trying to cleanse the particular Augean stable confided to his charge, declared some time ago that the Kensington slaughter-houses are in about as good a con-

dition as can be expected, "considering that the great majority of the premises were never constructed for the purposes to which they are applied." In this remark there is a great deal of latent significance. What is the exact meaning of the majority of the private slaughter-houses of London not having been constructed for slaughtering purposes? A description of an average establishment of this class may perhaps be of use in enabling the reader who eats meat to understand the nature of the places from which he derives daily sustenance for his body.

Let us take as a specimen an ordinary slaughter-house in Lambeth. It is situated behind the butcher's shop, and as there is no side entrance, the animals have to be driven through the shop-door, through the shop, and along a narrow passage, terminating in a turn to the left, down two steps. The "lair," or place where the animals are kept, is situated so that the wretched creatures can see right into the slaughter-house. There are no utensils for feeding or watering; there animals are kept as long as the butchers choose.

Or, take another instance. A roofed-in space just at the back of the shop, in close contiguity to an offal-heap and a dust-bin. It is about 10-ft. by 5-ft. in size: that is, about large enough for a man and a couple of sheep to stand in. Here we saw a butcher killing one lamb, while another stood in the corner, behind a hurdle, waiting its turn. On to this place the window of the butcher's residence looks out, and this is very often the case.

These two instances are taken from the result of an

inspection a few years back, and it may perhaps be said—"Oh, things are much better now." They are better in the fact that the number of private slaughter-houses has been greatly reduced, and that the very worst specimens have been closed. But it is impossible to assert that we are anywhere near perfection when such places are still, in this year, 1892, allowed to exist in Islington and Clerkenwell as are described in the following rough notes recently jotted down at the time of inspection.

"No. 4.—A calf and lamb slaughter-house only. Men had just done killing about six calves, which were hanging in place where killed. Long, narrow, low-roofed place. Ventilation insufficient. Very dirty. Floor of old, defective cement. Lair is just one end of slaughter-house barricaded off with low partition of zinc-covered wood. Man said it was a pity to alter it to make it higher, in accordance with County Council's new by-laws, 'as sheep could not see over top.' Partition really about three feet high. A lot of old, white-washed wood-work about, dirty like rest of place. A big, separate lair in an outhouse, wretchedly dark."

"No. 5. Very small pig-killing place. Here Inspector had reported that place was unsatisfactory, but licensed after personal examination by County Council Committee. Lair a corner of the room, big enough to hold one pig. Room itself (where slaughtering and hanging both take place) about 12 feet by 8 feet. Approach through shop, by winding passage. Window of house opens into slaughter-house. Next door to slaughtering-room, separated by

wooden partition, potatoes being peeled, and sausages being made."

"No. 6. An equally bad place. Very small sheep slaughter-house. Entrance through shop. One end used for lair. Here, in a space between 10 and 12 feet long by 4 to 5 feet wide fifteen large sheep were penned: panting very much from overcrowding: almost standing on each other's backs. No feeding or watering arrangements: indeed no room for it. No separate hanging place. Slaughter-house close to dwelling."

These extracts might be continued, but enough has now been said to show that almost every humane and sanitary principle is daily violated in these dens of cruelty.

Many attempts have been made at various times to introduce humanity into slaughter-houses. The efforts in this direction have been of two different kinds. Private individuals, out of a mere love of animals and dislike of the infliction of needless pain, have invented humane implements of killing, and have induced butchers to consent to give them a trial. Besides this, Parliament has passed Acts dealing with the public health, the indirect result of which would be, if carried out, to impose a certain check on slaughtering barbarities.

I.—Humane Inventions for Slaughtering.

While the killing of large animals presents greater difficulties than the killing of small ones, such as sheep, pigs, and calves, it is with respect to the latter that the discovery of a painless system is most imperatively required.

Unfortunately, from the ease with which the smaller animals can be handled, butchers have concluded that it does not much matter how they are despatched, so long as the affair is finished with reasonable quickness.

One of the earliest attempts to improve the method of killing bullocks was that made by Mr. Baxter, of Ealing Dean, himself a retired meat dealer. Mr. Baxter had seen enough of the cruelties practised in the slaughter-house to have a very strong desire to do something to remedy them. Accordingly, he invented an appliance which could be substituted for the pole-axe, and which he believed would prevent the possibility of frequent blows having to be struck before the bullock was felled. If he could ensure that the animal would fall stunned at the very first blow of the slaughterer, a very great improvement on present methods would have been placed at the disposal of butchers.

"Baxter's Mask" consists of a thin iron plate, bent into such a shape as to fit on to a bullock's forehead, and covered in its main points with leather. At the very centre of the forehead a hollow steel punch with sharp edges is inserted, working in a strong steel socket. The sharp edge rests on the animal's brow, while the other end of the punch is made into a strong rounded knob. The mask covers the animal's eyes, so that although the blow of the slaughterer is struck from in front, it does not know what is coming, and consequently does not flinch, and so spoil the blow. The striking implement is a heavy wooden mallet, wielded with both hands. When the blow descends

on the knob of the punch, the sharp part is driven with great force into the skull, and the animal drops to the ground stunned. It is not dead, and it has to be "pithed" and its throat cut in the usual way before death takes place. The theory on which humane slaughterers go is that the animal is rendered by the first blow unconscious to everything afterwards. At any rate, there can be no doubt that Baxter's mask prevents all the cruelty involved by clumsy or inexperienced operators striking blow after blow at the head of a bullock with the pole-axe before succeeding in felling it. The apparatus fastens on to the bullock's head by a spring, so that there is no loss of time in fastening it on. It has been tried in various slaughter-houses, and constantly used, and some butchers report that their men rather prefer using it than otherwise. Others assert that it would be impossible to fix the mask on the heads of wild Scotch or American beasts. It is astonishing that the use of this mask has not been more fully tried in places where a number of animals are killed daily, such as the Deptford and Birkenhead foreign cattle depôts, or the abattoirs at Manchester, Liverpool, and elsewhere. Private butchers will not adopt it unless compelled to do so, for the simple reason that each mask costs about thirty shillings. But to corporations and abattoir companies the expenditure of a few pounds is not a matter of much moment.

In the mask invented by Mr. Baxter a heavy blow with a mallet is needed. But a Frenchman, M. Bruneau, has invented a mask in which, instead of a punch, a small

pistol is inserted, charged with a bullet. All that is necessary is to touch the spring, a trigger, and a bullet is at once discharged into the centre of the animal's forehead.

Among humane implements must be classed those which render the killing process more rapid, although their introduction is due to a desire to save time and money, and not to any feelings of humanity. In some American slaughter-houses bullocks are killed by shooting. In others they are killed by stabbing, or severing the cervical vertebræ, by means of a heavy spear dropped from above. The shooting system is, as far as pain to the animal operated upon is concerned, an obvious improvement on the uncertainty of the pole-axe; but it would be interesting to learn whether accidents to workmen are unknown where it is adopted. The stabbing plan is worked by having an elevated platform stretched along the length of the building where the bullocks are laired, just above their heads. A man armed with the spear walks along and drops the heavily-weighted blade or rounded edge of the spear on to the neck of each animal in turn. Both systems are in use in the huge cattle-killing establishments in Chicago.

Turning to the smaller animals used by men for food, we, unfortunately, do not find that invention has been greatly at work to lessen their sufferings. The extreme expedition which prevails in the pig-killing establishments in Chicago would be commendable, if care were always taken that the animal was dead before the flaying and cutting-up operations commenced. Such, however, is reported not to be the case, and where speed is the one

object aimed at, an animal's death may be made more, instead of less, painful than it ordinarily is.

Electricity has been often recommended for the slaughter both of bullocks and sheep. The experiments hitherto made have shown that there are three objections to its use. First, the meat of an animal so killed is found to be streaked with black lines, and this although the blood is let out in the usual way. Probably no harm at all would result from the consumption of meat thus marked; but it is impossible to expect butchers ever to adopt a system which would have the effect of frightening away half their customers. Second, there is much danger to the operators. Third, it is still somewhat doubtful how far death by electricity can be said to be painless. Unless a very powerful shock be given, the animal is liable to revive in a surprising and disquieting manner when supposed to be quite dead. Until these objections can be removed—and the first of them seems to be of a kind which belongs to the constitution of nature, and cannot therefore be overcome—it would not be wise for any company or corporation, still less any private butcher, to embark on electrical killing of animals, the expense of which must be great.

Another method which has been suggested and tried is not open to the objections surrounding electricity. This is the method of anæsthetics. If we could send our sheep and oxen into a narcotic sleep before delivering the fatal blow, it is obvious that they would feel nothing. At the small model slaughtering-place erected by the Croydon Corporation for the use of "The London Abattoir Society,"

a Society founded to try and introduce better methods of killing, sheep were actually killed by this system. A small bag containing carbonic oxide gas was slung on to the back of the slaughter-man. An indiarubber tube connected with a small mouth-piece was shaped so as to exactly cover the nose and mouth of a sheep. The mouth-piece having been affixed, the gas was turned on, and after some seconds the animal fell down unconscious. The apparatus was at once removed from its head, and the blood let out in the usual way. Considering that this was a first experiment, it may be said to have been successful; but it only demonstrated, what cannot now be doubted, that without much expenditure of time or money it would be possible to have every animal killed for food made insensible before death. No damage whatever is done to the quality of the meat. But it is, of course, absurd to suppose that butchers will take up such a reform of their own initiative. In a large abattoir special anæsthetic chambers could be constructed, into which not only sheep, but bullocks also, could, as a matter of course, be introduced before slaughtering. If established on a large scale, the cost of the construction of the chambers would not be heavy, and the cost of the gas used is insignificant. Moreover, in a large place the system could be so worked as to cause no loss of time in the slaughtering operation, because one animal could be being anæsthetised while another was being killed and cut up; whereas, in a small private establishment, the loss of time would be considerable—a fatal objection in the eyes of the practical butcher.

Probably, for large animals, the Baxter mask, or the American stabbing-spear, would be found more serviceable and less expensive than anæsthetics.

II.—Legislative Interference.

Only a brief reference need here be made to this part of the subject. The efforts of Parliament have been devoted not to providing for the humane treatment of animals in slaughter-houses, but to the minimising of the nuisance and danger to public health incidental to such places. Local authorities are empowered to make by-laws, which regulate such matters as the supply of water, the construction of the buildings, limewashing the walls, cleansing the pounds, disposal of refuse, etc. And for continued neglect of such by-laws fines can be imposed and the slaughtering license itself revoked. The London County Council has, in its new by-laws, inserted a clause directing that "an occupier of a slaughter-house shall use such instruments and applicances, and adopt such method of slaughtering, and otherwise take such precautions, as may be requisite to prevent unnecessary suffering to the animal."

In conclusion, with regard to the reforms needed in this revolting business, what is wanted in London is the establishment of about a dozen public abattoirs in the outskirts, *and the legislative abolition of all private slaughter-houses.* The same principles could be applied in all towns, and in the more populous country districts as well. Thus only is it possible to guard against the sale of diseased meat, and to ensure the buildings in which the slaughtering trade goes

on being constructed, and inspected, so as to have regard alike to humanity to animals, the healthiness of the meat supply, and the decent comfort of the unfortunate operators. It is in such large establishments alone that we can hope to see merciful lethal apparatus introduced.

But the true moral of all that can be said on the subject of improvement of slaughter-houses and methods of slaughtering would appear to be that, as numberless instances all round us show the possibility of healthy and happy human lives being lived without recourse to the butcher, the ultimate object to be aimed at is the gradual education of public opinion up to the point of looking on both butchers' shops and slaughter-houses as relics of barbarism.

THE

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