

PLUTARCH'S MORALS.

OF EATING OF FLESH.

TRACT I.

1. You ask of me then for what reason it was that Pythagoras abstained from eating of flesh. I for my part do much admire in what humor, with what soul or reason, the first man with his mouth touched slaughter, and reached to his lips the flesh of a dead animal, and having set before people courses of ghastly corpses and ghosts, could give those parts the names of meat and victuals, that but a little before lowed, cried, moved, and saw; how his sight could endure the blood of slaughtered, flayed, and mangled bodies; how his smell could bear their scent; and how the very nastiness happened not to offend the taste, while it chewed the sores of others, and participated of the saps and juices of deadly wounds.

Crept the raw hides, and with a bellowing sound
Roared the dead limbs; the burning entrails groaned.*

This indeed is but a fiction and fancy; but the fare itself is truly monstrous and prodigious, — that a man should have a stomach to creatures while they yet bellow, and that he should be giving directions which of things yet alive and speaking is fittest to make food of, and ordering the several manners of the seasoning and dressing them and serving them up to tables. You ought rather, in my opinion, to have enquired who first began this practice, than who of late times left it off.

* Odyss. XII. 395.

2. And truly, as for those people who first ventured upon eating of flesh, it is very probable that the whole reason of their so doing was scarcity and want of other food; for it is not likely that their living together in lawless and extravagant lusts, or their growing wanton and capricious through the excessive variety of provisions then among them, brought them to such unsociable pleasures as these, against Nature. Yea, had they at this instant but their sense and voice restored to them, I am persuaded they would express themselves to this purpose.

“Oh! happy you, and highly favored of the Gods, who now live! Into what an age of the world are you fallen, who share and enjoy among you a plentiful portion of good things! What abundance of things spring up for your use! What fruitful vineyards you enjoy! What wealth you gather from the fields! What delicacies from trees and plants, which you may gather! You may glut and fill yourselves without being polluted. As for us, we fell upon the most dismal and affrighting part of time, in which we were exposed by our first production to manifold and inextricable wants and necessities. As yet the thickened air concealed the heaven from our view, and the stars were as yet confused with a disorderly huddle of fire and moisture and violent fluxions of winds. As yet the sun was not fixed to an unwandering and certain course, so as to distinguish morning and evening, nor did he bring back the seasons in order crowned with wreaths from the fruitful harvest. The land was also spoiled by the inundations of disorderly rivers; and a great part of it was deformed with sloughs, and utterly wild by reason of deep quagmires, unfertile forests, and woods. There was then no production of tame fruits, nor any instruments of art or invention of wit. And hunger gave no time, nor did seed-time then stay for the yearly season. What wonder is it if we made use of the flesh of beasts contrary to Na-

ture, when mud was eaten and the bark of wood, and when it was thought a happy thing to find either a sprouting grass or a root of any plant! But when they had by chance tasted of or eaten an acorn, they danced for very joy about some oak or esculus, calling it by the names of life-giver, mother, and nourisher. And this was the only festival that those times were acquainted with; upon all other occasions, all things were full of anguish and dismal sadness. But whence is it that a certain ravenousness and frenzy drives you in these happy days to pollute yourselves with blood, since you have such an abundance of things necessary for your subsistence? Why do you belie the earth as unable to maintain you? Why do you profane the lawgiver Ceres, and shame the mild and gentle Bacchus, as not furnishing you with sufficiency? Are you not ashamed to mix tame fruits with blood and slaughter? You are indeed wont to call serpents, leopards, and lions savage creatures; but yet yourselves are defiled with blood, and come nothing behind them in cruelty. What they kill is their ordinary nourishment, but what you kill is your better fare."

3. For we eat not lions and wolves by way of revenge; but we let those go, and catch the harmless and tame sort, and such as have neither stings nor teeth to bite with, and slay them; which, so may Jove help us, Nature seems to us to have produced for their beauty and comeliness only. * [Just as if one seeing the river Nilus overflowing its banks, and thereby filling the whole country with genial and fertile moisture, should not at all admire that secret power in it that produces plants and plenteousness of most sweet and useful fruits, but beholding somewhere a crocodile swimming in it, or an asp crawling along, or mice

* "I see not how this that is included within these marks [] agreeth with this place, or matter in hand: I suppose therefore it is inserted heere without judgement, and taken out of some other booke."—HOLLAND.

(savage and filthy creatures), should presently affirm these to be the occasion of all that is amiss, or of any want or defect that may happen. Or as if indeed one contemplating this land or ground, how full it is of tame fruits, and how heavy with ears of corn, should afterwards espy somewhere in these same cornfields an ear of darnel or a wild vetch, and thereupon neglect to reap and gather in the corn, and fall a complaining of these. Such another thing it would be, if one — hearing the harangue of some advocate at some bar or pleading, swelling and enlarging and hastening towards the relief of some impending danger, or else, by Jupiter, in the impeaching and charging of certain audacious villanies or indictments, flowing and rolling along, and that not in a simple and poor strain, but with many sorts of passions all at once, or rather indeed with all sorts, in one and the same manner, into the many and various and differing minds of either hearers or judges that he is either to turn and change, or else, by Jupiter, to soften, appease, and quiet — should overlook all this business, and never consider or reckon upon the labor or struggle he had undergone, but pick up certain loose expressions, which the rapid motion of the discourse had carried along with it, as by the current of its stream, and so had slipped and escaped the rest of the oration, and hereupon undervalue the orator.]

4. But we are nothing put out of countenance, either by the beauteous gayety of the colors, or by the charmingness of the musical voices, or by the rare sagacity of the intellects, or by the cleanliness and neatness of diet, or by the rare discretion and prudence of these poor unfortunate animals; but for the sake of some little mouthful of flesh, we deprive a soul of the sun and light, and of that proportion of life and time it had been born into the world to enjoy. And then we fancy that the voices it utters and screams forth to us are nothing else but certain inarticulate

sounds and noises, and not the several deprecations, entreaties, and pleadings of each of them, as it were saying thus to us: "I deprecate not thy necessity (if such there be), but thy wantonness. Kill me for thy feeding, but do not take me off for thy better feeding." O horrible cruelty! It is truly an affecting sight to see the very table of rich people laid before them, who keep them cooks and caterers to furnish them with dead corpses for their daily fare; but it is yet more affecting to see it taken away, for the mammoths left are more than that which was eaten. These therefore were slain to no purpose. Others there are, who are so sparing of what is set before them that they will not suffer it to be cut or sliced; thus abstaining from them when dead, while they would not spare them when alive.

5. Well then, we understand that that sort of men are used to say, that in eating of flesh they follow the conduct and direction of Nature. But that it is not natural to mankind to feed on flesh, we first of all demonstrate from the very shape and figure of the body. For a human body no ways resembles those that were born for ravenousness; it hath no hawk's bill, no sharp talon, no roughness of teeth, no such strength of stomach or heat of digestion, as can be sufficient to convert or alter such heavy and fleshy fare. But even from hence, that is, from the smoothness of the tongue, and the slowness of the stomach to digest, Nature seems to disclaim all pretence to fleshy victuals. But if you will contend that yourself was born to an inclination to such food as you have now a mind to eat, do you then yourself kill what you would eat. But do it yourself, without the help of a chopping-knife, mallet, or axe, — as wolves, bears, and lions do, who kill and eat at once. Rend an ox with thy teeth, worry a hog with thy mouth, tear a lamb or a hare in pieces, and fall on and eat it alive as they do. But if thou hadst rather stay until what thou eatest is become dead, and if thou art loath to force a soul

out of its body, why then dost thou against Nature eat an animate thing? Nay, there is nobody that is willing to eat even a lifeless and a dead thing as it is; but they boil it, and roast it, and alter it by fire and medicines, as it were, changing and quenching the slaughtered gore with thousands of sweet sauces, that the palate being thereby deceived may admit of such uncouth fare. It was indeed a witty expression of a Lacedaemonian, who, having purchased a small fish in a certain inn, delivered it to his landlord to be dressed; and as he demanded cheese, and vinegar, and oil to make sauce, he replied, if I had had those, I would not have bought the fish. But we are grown so wanton in our bloody luxury, that we have bestowed upon flesh the name of meat (*ὄψον*), and then require another seasoning (*ὄψον*), to this same flesh, mixing oil, wine, honey, pickle, and vinegar, with Syrian and Arabian spices, as though we really meant to embalm it after its disease. Indeed when things are dissolved and made thus tender and soft, and are as it were turned into a sort of a carrionly corruption, it must needs be a great difficulty for concoction to master them, and when it hath mastered them, they must needs cause grievous oppressions and qualmy indigestions.

6. Diogenes ventured once to eat a raw pourcontrol, that he might disuse himself from meat dressed by fire; and as several priests and other people stood round him, he wrapped his head in his cassock, and so putting the fish to his mouth, he thus said unto them: It is for your sake, sirs, that I undergo this danger, and run this risk. A noble and gallant risk, by Jupiter! For far otherwise than as Pelopidas ventured his life for the liberty of the Thebans, and Harmodius and Aristogiton for that of the Athenians, did this philosopher encounter with a raw pourcontrol, to the end he might make human life more brutish. Moreover, these same flesh-eatings not only are preter-

natural to men's bodies, but also by clogging and cloying them, they render their very minds and intellects gross. For it is well known to most, that wine and much flesh-eating make the body indeed strong and lusty, but the mind weak and feeble. And that I may not offend the wrestlers, I will make use of examples out of my own country. The Athenians are wont to call us Boeotians gross, senseless, and stupid fellows, for no other reason but our over-much eating; and Pindar calls us also hogs, for the same reason. Menander the comedian calls us "fellows with long jaws." It is observed also that, according to the saying of Heraclitus, "the wisest soul is like a dry light."* Earthen jars, if you strike them, will sound; but if they be full, they perceive not the strokes that are given them. Copper vessels also that are thin communicate the sound round about them, unless some one stop and dull the ambient stroke with his fingers. Moreover, the eye, when seized with an over-great plenitude of humors, grows dim and feeble for its ordinary work. When we behold the sun through a humid air and a great quantity of gross and indigested vapors, we see it not clear and bright, but obscure and cloudy, and with glimmering beams. Just so in a muddy and clogged body, that is swagged down with heavy and unnatural nourishments; it must needs happen that the gayety and splendor of the mind be confused and dulled, and that it ramble and roll after little and scarce discernible objects, since it wants clearness and vigor for higher things.

7. But to pass by these considerations, is not accustoming one's self to mildness and a human temper of mind an admirable thing? For who could wrong or injure a man that is so sweetly and humanly disposed with respect to the ills of strangers that are not of his kind? I remember that three days ago, as I was discoursing, I made mention

* See Mullach, *Fragm. Philos.* p. 325 (No. 73).

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:
Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature
which can be purchased on our Website :
www.Brainfly.net

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :
Brainfly Inc.
5100 Garfield Ave. #46
Sacramento CA 95841-3839

TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website (www.Brainfly.net) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

webcomments@brainfly.net