

THE SQUARE OF FLESH



WHEN I was in third grade, jackknives fascinated me. My older brothers were expert whittlers. They bragged about their prowess and I burned to distinguish myself, but I didn't know how.

Finally, I hit on a plan. I would cut a little square of flesh out of my hand and see what happened. It would be an experiment, to test my skill with a knife, and also the behavior of my flesh and my ability to endure pain. I would be a heroine in my brothers' eyes.

I tried. But each time before the knife point pierced the skin, my nerves screamed, "Stop!" and I couldn't make the cut. My motive was strong, but the power of pain was stronger. Again and again I steeled myself, began to cut, but when the hurt came I backed away.

The Golden Rule is based on the idea that hurting others is hurting ourselves. How can we do this? We can do it only by deadening our nerves. Only with numbed feelings can we do mortal harm to ourselves and not even feel it.

The poet Shelley said that he was a nerve through which surged the suffering of the whole world. He flung world-wide the cries of tortured dogs, but though we honor him for his poetry,



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SHE LEARNED THE LESSON EARLY IN LIFE THAT, UNLESS GIFTED WITH IMAGINATION, NO MAN SENSES ANOTHER'S HURT. CAN ONLY A POET FEEL THE PAIN OF THE WORLD?

By Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci

we have laughed off his pleas on behalf of the sufferers. His vocal appeals, like the cords of a dog's throat, have been silenced. (Although I majored in English literature and Shelley was my favorite poet, it was long after I left school before I learned that Shelley was an anti-vivisectionist.)

Perhaps only a poet can fully sense the pain of another. If so, we must all become poets. Already there is an awakening to the need for bringing science under the humanizing influence of art. In a recent scientific article (*Engineer*, March-April, 1968) Robert Hutchins takes technology to task for its moral neutrality. Moral neutrality is the ability to wield a sharp knife without feeling any pain when the knife cuts too deep.

Vivisection is possible only to the morally neutral. They can still feel physical pain — their own — but they have not the sensitivity to feel the pain of others and, because of it, to forbear.

What of the scientist who hires helpers to stir swimming rats until they sink and die from exhaustion?

What about those who set up smoking experiments on dogs and coldly analyze results? Or who cut and whittle the vital organs and entrails of all sorts of animals to gain the lush handouts granted to "researchers"?

What of the unspeakable distortions of natural function in the name of scientific inquiry?

The animal suffers pain. The man feels nothing. If he felt the pain, he could not carry on the experiment. If he felt the pain, he would feel that the experiment *should not be carried on*.

Even in third grade, I knew that I must not use my knife on anyone but myself. Feeling would dictate how much I could stand. I was disappointed to find that I could stand very little. I looked for another way to gain glory with my brothers.

Sensitivity to pain is a powerful protector of the individual, but only imagination and compassion can extend that protection beyond the individual.

Reprinted courtesy A-V Magazine,

Distributed by The Beaver Defenders, Newfield, N. J. 08344.