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A DISSERTATION UPON  
ROAST PIG



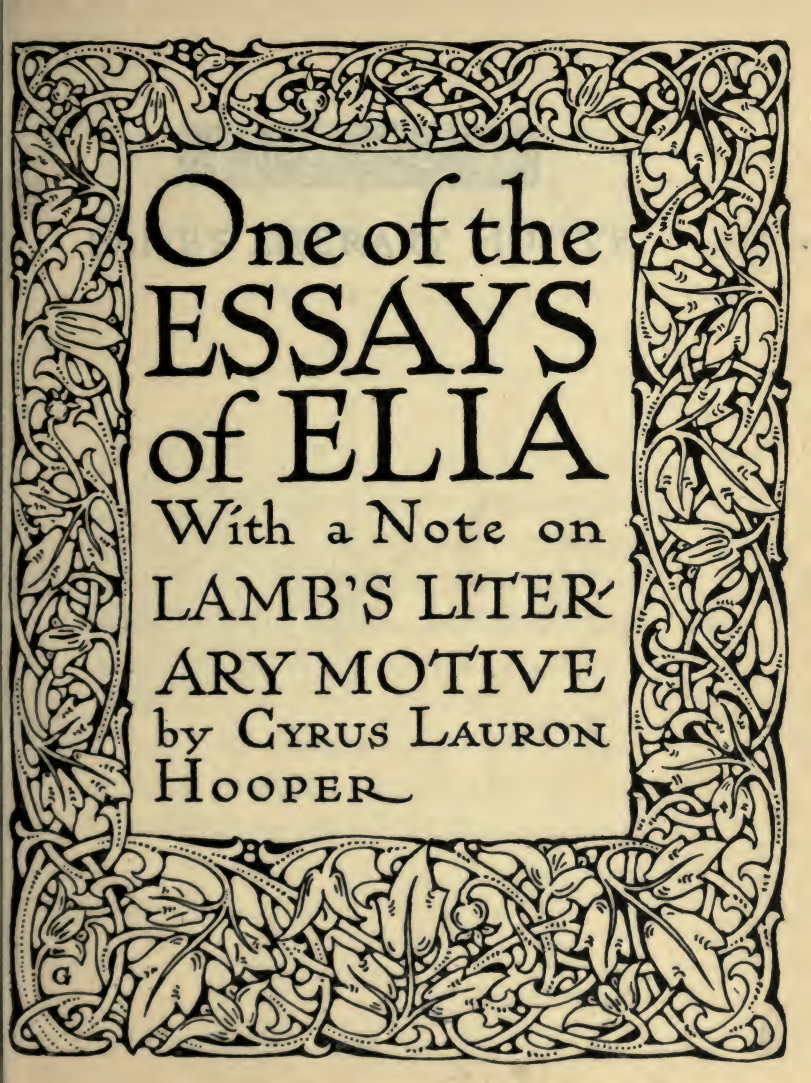
A DISSERTATION UPON  
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PIGS  
by  
Hoover



A DIS-  
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UPON  
ROAST  
PIG





One of the  
**ESSAYS**  
of **ELIA**

With a Note on  
LAMB'S LITER-  
ARY MOTIVE  
by CYRUS LAURON  
HOOPER



One of the  
ESSAYS  
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ARY MOTIVE  
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HOOPER





# LAMB'S LITERARY MOTIVE

## LAMB'S LITERARY MOTIVE



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HE spirit the age has, to pry into the consciousness of men, tracing their motives from first causes, through various activities, to ultimate effects, may well be pronounced hazardous if one hopes to find absolute truth. The method must

be, originally, subjective; & finally objective; the two manners frequently crossing and returning one upon the other, making possible many errors in the labor of projecting one's states of consciousness into another. For, obviously, the thinker may mistake his own mental idiosyncrasy for a general psychic law, and thus err in his projection; or he may be wholly ignorant of vital facts of his subject's mind, may exaggerate some, minimize others, thus widely misconceiving the total consciousness under his scalpel. Such dissection is naturally harmless on the bodiless creations of fiction, detracting only from the writer's merit: but in the case of historical

or literary characters, harm may follow; and the grain of salt must therefore be at the reader's hand.

A theory I heard of the underlying cause of a certain man's vagaries is to the point. This man, a preacher known widely for a keen intellect and a fine oratorical manner, was in his social relations as much a provoker of laughter as in the pulpit a mover of profound and serious thinking. Unheard of practical jokes and unministerial violations of the proprieties were his daily practices. On one occasion, at a hotel table, he slipped some spoons into the pocket of a fellow preacher, & afterward contrived to discover them to the crowd in the

lobby, seeming to enjoy the embarrassment caused. Although such antics were accepted by his friends as evidences of good fellowship and buoyant spirit, he did not receive with equal good nature the practical joke of which he was the victim: he became angry, and seemed to lose entirely his sense of humor. This was recalled afterward, when he died suddenly of heart disease; and an effort was made to account for his inconsistency. Some one who knew him well explained that, knowing of his disease, and not knowing what moment might be his end, he had as a motive for his pranks the necessity of a mental activity so stimulating



and diverting as to drive away all thoughts of death, but that when the tables were turned upon him, the activity, not being his own, but another's, afforded him no such relief. The theory seemed ingenious, but it was only a theory, and in the making of it there were the chances of error already set down.

Now in the case of those who put to paper immortal words for our delight, we are not content to read and enjoy; we must needs know the why and the wherefore of literary motive, whether the purpose were moral, philosophic, pure art, or what not. The first & the second of these afford no challenge to us, their very nature

making them plain and open; but the third, revealing of itself no utility, calls loudly upon us to ask the cause of its bringing forth. How did the author happen to conceive his thought? What brought into his brain a conception so unique? and how did it happen to be wrought in lines so fine and enduring?

“A Dissertation upon Roast Pig” is one of those that offer the challenge, and in its company are all the essays of Elia—more particularly those of so strictly a personal nature as to startle the reader, as “Dream Children.” This note of personality is indeed the key to what appears to the writer as the secret of Lamb’s literary motive.



In the essay just mentioned, how naturally does Elia draw the picture of his telling his children evening stories of their great-grandmother Field!—how she lived in a great house full of delightful associations; how good she was; how accomplished. And who that does not know of Lamb's love of a fair Alice & of his lifelong bachelordom, can help being deceived by the simple statement, "Here Alice put on one of her dear mother's looks"? At the end the reader is startled at seeing the two children grow fainter to the view, leaving in their places "the effects of speech," thus: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of

Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing, less than nothing, & dreams. We are only what might have been, & must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name.”

The personality of it! And of many other of the Elia essays! For although Lamb is always trying to deceive his reader by changing the names & relationships of his characters, by warping this or that fact into an unrecognizable form, and then, contrarily, deceiving as well with the truth unexpectedly given, he is always true to his personal view of people & things, and gives it with an accuracy that causes the reader to wonder how he

could have gained his consent so to reveal himself and those dearest to him.

The question finds an answer, perhaps, in Lamb's compelled effort to direct his thoughts away from the taint of madness that afflicted his house,—the madness that had overtaken him when, conceiving his duty to be toward his sister, he had given up the hope of his Alice's love; the madness that drove this sister to kill her own mother. "I am got somewhat rational now, & don't bite any one. But mad I was!" he wrote to Coleridge, when recently come out of what proved to be his only attack of the family malady. Mary's madness was always present—a shadow

that dimmed the sunlight of their lives. Charles gave himself the life-long duty of watching over her, of smoothing the rough places in her path; but too often the path led across the fields to the house where he took her when the dreaded attack could be warded off no longer, & thither they went hand in hand, and in tears. Then the lonely apartments for Charles, after his work at the office, and days and weeks in the shadow. Doubtless it is inevitable that in such circumstances any human mind must meditate unresistingly upon the trial of the moment, & thus itself sink into madness, or by sheer force of will, or drink, drive itself into wholly foreign

regions of thought; or, finding as a resultant between the two contending forces a line of thought between the other two, escape both madness and the necessity of forcing an uncongenial or artificial state of mental activity. Thus the state attained becomes the diagonal of the parallelogram. In Lamb's case, it was pleasurable reminiscence lying between thoughts of the family taint on the one side and the freedom from such thoughts he sought in conviviality.

Such pleasurable reminiscence is everywhere in the Essays of Elia, and it is foreshadowed in the poem of which the following is, I think, the most significant stanza:—



“Ghost-like I paced round the haunts  
of my childhood.

Earth seemed a desert I was  
bound to traverse, (faces.”

Seeking to find the old familiar  
The necessity of seeking relief from  
sorrow in such of his past as was pleas-  
urable, appears in his letters as well  
as in the essays. He wrote to Cole-  
ridge, “Mary, in consequence of fa-  
tigue and anxiety, is fallen ill again,  
and I was obliged to remove her yes-  
terday. I am left alone in a house with  
nothing but Hetty’s dead body to  
keep me company.” (Hetty was an  
old servant who had just died.) “To-  
morrow I bury her, then I shall be  
quite alone with nothing but a cat to

remind me that the house has been full of living beings like myself. My heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better again, but her constantly being liable to these attacks is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a manner marked. Excuse my troubling you, but I have nobody by me to speak to me. I slept out last night, not being able to endure the change & the stillness; but I did not sleep well, and I must come back to my own bed. I am going to try and get a friend to come and be with me to-morrow. I am completely shipwrecked. My head is

quite bad. I almost wish that Mary were dead." And a little later, writing to his friend Manning, the friend mentioned as "M." in "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig", he says that he is about to change his lodging. "I have partly fixed upon most delectable lodgings," he says, "which look out (when you stand a tip-toe) over the Thames & Surrey Hills, at the upper end of King's Bench Walks in the Temple. There I shall have all the privacy of a house without the encumbrance, and shall be able to lock my friends out as often as I desire to hold free converse with my immortal mind—for my present lodgings resemble a minister's levee, I have so



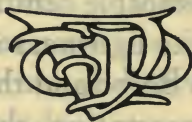
increased my acquaintance (as they call 'em) since I have resided in town.  
. . . . . By my new plan I shall be as airy, up four pair of stairs, as in the country, & in a garden in the midst of enchanting (more than Mohammedan paradise) London, whose dirtiest drab-frequented alley, and her lowest-bowing tradesman, I would not exchange for Skiddaw, Helvellyn, James, Walter, and the parson into the bargain. O! her lamps of a night! her rich goldsmiths, print-shops, toy-shops, mercers, hardware men, pastry-cooks, St. Paul's Churchyard, the Strand, Exeter Change, Charing Cross, with the man upon a black horse! These are thy gods, O London!

Ain't you mightily moped on the banks of the Cam? Had you not better come and set up here? You can't think what a difference. All the streets and pavements are pure gold, I warrant you. At least, I know an alchemy that turns her mud into that metal—a mind that loves to be at home in crowds."

For it was in these crowds that Lamb was born; & his keenest pleasure was the recording of his contemplations of them. His preference was for the city, but the loving touches are found too in what he wrote of country life as he had seen it. But whether city or country was his theme, he wrote of it in the light of

his own personal experience; & that he could do this was the essence of his genius as well as his line of safety between madness and the wasting of his life in conviviality. This literary habit of pleasurable reminiscence appears in all its lightness in the story of Horti and Bobo and the delightful culinary dissertation that follows. Here are the happy memories of many feasts—the spiritual expression of materialistic joys. The task of writing it—if the writing of an essay of such seeming spontaneity could have been a task—could have been done only by one long accustomed to think lovingly over past experiences and to write them more for his own pleasure

than for that of others. It was in seeking his escape from his tragic past that he endeared himself to the English race.






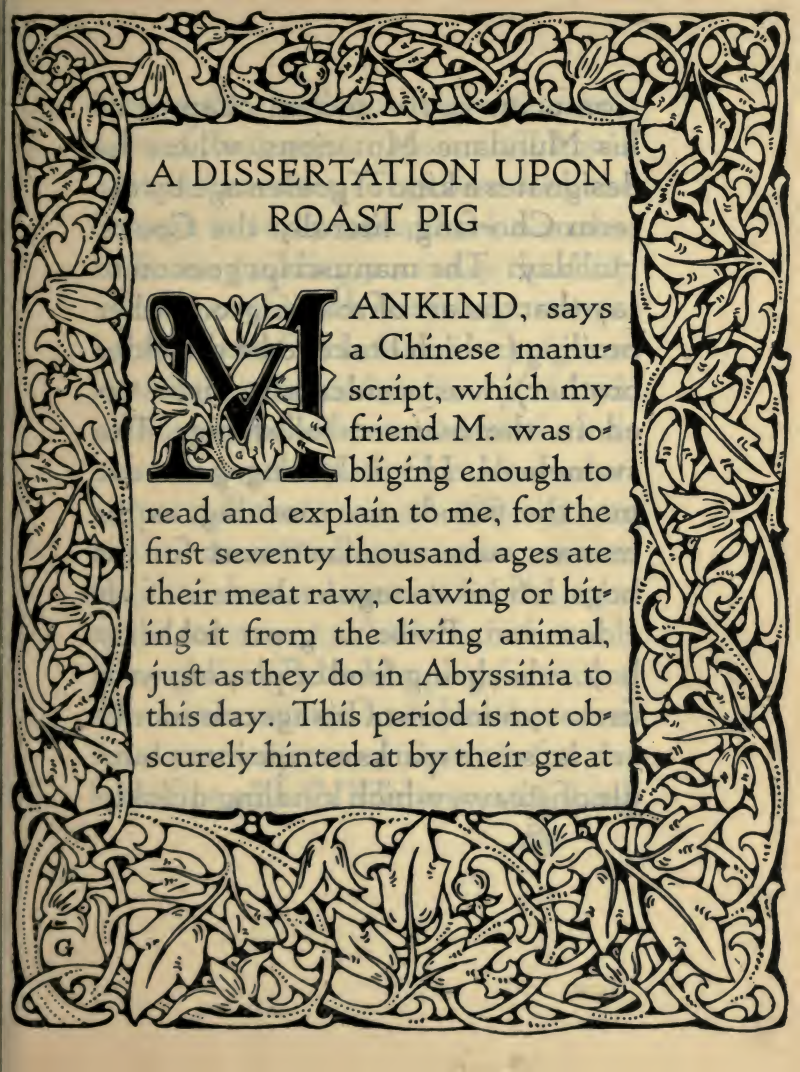
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A DISSERTATION UPON  
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**M**ANKIND, says a Chinese manuscript, which my friend M. was obliging enough to read and explain to me, for the first seventy thousand ages ate their meat raw, clawing or biting it from the living animal, just as they do in Abyssinia to this day. This period is not obscurely hinted at by their great

Confucius in the second chapter of his Mundane Mutations, where he designates a kind of golden age by the term Cho-fang, literally the Cooks' Holiday. The manuscript goes on to say that the art of roasting, or rather broiling (which I take to be the elder brother), was accidentally discovered in the manner following: The swineherd, Ho-ti, having gone out into the woods one morning, as his manner was, to collect mast for his hogs, left his cottage in the care of his eldest son, Bo-bo, a great lubberly boy, who, being fond of playing with fire, as youngers of his age commonly are, let some sparks escape into a bundle of straw, which kindling quickly



spread the conflagration over every part of their poor mansion, till it was reduced to ashes. Together with the cottage (a sorry antediluvian makeshift of a building you may think it), what was of much more importance, a fine litter of new-farrowed pigs, no less than nine in number, perished. China pigs have been esteemed a luxury all over the East, from the remotest periods that we read of. Bo-bo was in the utmost consternation, as you may think, not so much for the sake of the tenement, which his father and he could easily build up again with a few dry branches, and the labor of an hour or two, at any time, as for the loss of the pigs. While he was thinking

what he should say to his father, and wringing his hands over the smoking remnants of one of those untimely sufferers, an odor assailed his nostrils, unlike any scent which he had before experienced. What could it proceed from? not from the burnt cottage, he had smelt that smell before; indeed, this was by no means the first accident of the kind which had occurred through the negligence of this unlucky young firebrand. Much less did it resemble that of any known herb, weed, or flower. A premonitory moistening at the same time overflowed his nether lip. He knew not what to think. He next stooped down to feel the pig, if there were any signs

of life in it. He burnt his fingers, and to cool them he applied them in his booby fashion to his mouth. Some of the crumbs of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life, indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted—CRACKLING! Again he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now, still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious; and surrendering himself up to the new-born pleasure, he fell to tearing up whole handfuls of the scorched skin

with the flesh next it, and was cramming it down his throat in his beastly fashion, when his sire entered amid the smoking rafters, armed with retributory cudgel, and finding how affairs stood, began to rain blows upon the young rogue's shoulders, as thick as hailstones, which Bo-bo heeded not any more than if they had been flies. The tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his lower regions, had rendered him quite callous to any inconveniences he might feel in those remote quarters. His father might lay on, but he could not beat him from his pig, till he had fairly made an end of it, when, becoming a little more sensible of his situation, something

like the following dialogue ensued :

“You graceless whelp, what have you got there devouring? Is it not enough that you have burnt me down three houses with your dog’s tricks, and be hanged to you! but you must be eating fire, and I know not what—what have you got there, I say?”

“O father, the pig, the pig! do come and taste how nice the burnt pig eats.”

The ears of Ho-ti tingled with horror. He cursed his son, and he cursed himself that ever he should beget a son that should eat burnt pig.

Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, & fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half



by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out, "Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig father, only taste—O Lord!"—with such-like barbarous ejaculations, cramming all the while as if he would choke.

Ho-ti trembled every joint while he grasped the abominable thing, wavering whether he should not put his son to death for an unnatural young monster, when the crackling scorching his fingers, as it had done his son's and applying the same remedy to them, he in his turn tasted some of its flavor, which, make what sour mouths he would for a pretense, proved not altogether displeasing to him. In conclusion (for the manuscript

here is a little tedious) both father and son fairly sat down to the mess, and never left off till they had despatched all that remained of the litter.

Bo-bo was strictly enjoined not to let the secret escape, for the neighbors would certainly have stoned them for a couple of abominable wretches, who could think of improving upon the good meat which God had sent them. Nevertheless, strange stories got about. It was observed that Hoti's cottage was burnt down now more frequently than ever. Nothing but fires from this time forward. Some would break out in broad day, others in the night-time. As often as the sow farrowed, so sure was the



house of Ho-ti to be in a blaze; & Ho-ti himself, which was the more remarkable, instead of chastising his son, seemed to grow more indulgent to him than ever. At length they were watched, the terrible mystery discovered, and father and son summoned to take their trial at Pekin, then an inconsiderable assize town. Evidence was given, the obnoxious food itself produced in court, and verdict about to be pronounced, when the foreman of the jury begged that some of the burnt pig, of which the culprits stood accused, might be handed into the box. He handled it, and they all handled it; and burning their fingers, as Bo-bo and his father had

done before them, & nature prompting to each of them the same remedy, against the face of all the facts, & the clearest charge which judge had ever given,—to the surprise of the whole court, townsfolk, strangers, reporters, and all present—without leaving the box, or any manner of consultation whatever, they brought in a simultaneous verdict of Not Guilty.

The judge, who was a shrewd fellow, winked at the manifest iniquity of the decision; and when the court was dismissed, went privily & bought up all the pigs that could be had for love or money. In a few days his Lordship's town-house was observed to be on fire. The thing took wing, & now

there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction. Fuel and pigs grew enormously dear all over the district. The insurance-offices one and all shut up shop. People built slighter & slighter every day, until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world. Thus this custom of firing houses continued, till in process of time, says my manuscript, a sage arose, like our Locke, who made a discovery that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked (burnt, as they called it) without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it. Then first began the rude form of a gridiron.

Roasting by the string or spit came in a century or two later, I forget in whose dynasty. By such slow degrees, concludes the manuscript, do the most useful, & seemingly the most obvious, arts make their way among mankind.

Without placing too implicit faith in the account above given, it must be agreed that if a worthy pretext for so dangerous an experiment as setting houses on fire (especially in these days) could be assigned in favor of any culinary object, that pretext and excuse might be found in ROAST PIG.

Of all the delicacies in the whole mundus edibilis, I will maintain it to be the most delicate—princeps obso-  
niorum.

I speak not of your grown porkers—things between pig & pork—those hobbledehoys—but a young and tender suckling—under a moon old—guiltless as yet of the sty, with no original speck of the amor immunditiæ, the hereditary failing of the first parent, yet manifest—his voice as yet not broken, but something between a childish treble and a grumble—the mild forerunner or præludium of a grunt.

**HE MUST BE ROASTED.** I am not ignorant that our ancestors ate them seethed, or boiled—but what a sacrifice of the exterior tegument!

There is no flavor comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp,



tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, CRACKLING, as it is well called, the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance, with the adhesive oleaginous— O call it not fat! but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it—the tender blossoming of fat—fat cropped in the bud—taken in the shoot—in the first innocence, the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure food, the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna, or, rather fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result or common substance.



Behold him while he is doing—it seemeth rather a refreshing warmth, than a scorching heat, that he is so passive to. How equably he twirl-eth round the string!—Now he is just done. To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age! he hath wept out his pretty eyes—radiant jellies—shooting stars.

See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth! wouldst thou have had this innocent grow up to the grossness and indocility which too often accompany maturer swinehood? Ten to one he would have proved a glutton, a sloven, an obstinate, disagreeable animal, wallowing in all manner of filthy conversation, from

these sins he is happily snatched away—

Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade,  
Death came with timely care—

his memory is odoriferous—no clown curseth, while his stomach half rejecteth, the rank bacon—no coal-heaver bolteth him in reeking sausages—he hath a fair sepulchre in the grateful stomach of the judicious epicure, & for such a tomb might be content to die.

He is the best of Savors. Pineapple is great. She is indeed almost transcendent—a delight, if not sinful, yet so like to sinning, that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause; too ravishing for mortal taste,

she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her; like lovers' kisses, she biteth; she is a pleasure bordering on pain from the fierceness and insanity of her relish—but she stoppeth at the palate; she meddleth not with the appetite, and the coarsest hunger might barter her consistently for a mutton-chop.

Pig, let me speak his praise, is no less provocative of the appetite than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the sensorious palate. The strong man may batten on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices.

Unlike to mankind's mixed characters, a bundle of virtues and vices, inexplicably intertwined, and not to

be unravelled without hazard, he is good throughout. No part of him is better or worse than another. He helpeth, as far as his little means extend, all around. He is the least envious of banquets. He is all neighbors' fare.

I am one of those who freely and ungrudgingly impart a share of the good things of this life which fall to their lot (few as mine are in this kind) to a friend. I protest I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own. "Presents," I often say, "endear Absents." Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chickens (those "tame villatic fowl"), capons,

plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, like Lear, "give everything." I make my stand upon pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavors to extra-domiciliate, or send out of the house slightly (under pretext of friendship, or I know not what) a blessing so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate.— It argues an insensibility.

I remember a touch of conscience in this kind at school. My good old aunt, who never parted from me at



the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweetmeat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London Bridge) a gray-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt, at this time of day, that he was a counterfeit). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, & the very combrury of charity, school-boy like, I made him a present of—the whole cake! I walked on a little, buoyed up, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but, before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned,



and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go & give her good gift away to a stranger that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I—I myself, and not another—would eat her nice cake, and what should I say to her the next time I saw her; how naughty I was to part with her pretty present! and the odor of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had

never had a bit of it in my mouth at last—and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness; and above all I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old gray impostor.

Our ancestors were nice in their method of sacrificing these tender victims. We read of pigs whipt to death with something of a shock, as we hear of any other obsolete custom. The age of discipline is gone by, or it would be curious to inquire (in a philosophical light merely) what effect this process might have towards intenerating & dulcifying a substance naturally so mild and dulcet as the

flesh of young pigs. It looks like refining a violet. Yet we should be cautious, while we condemn the inhumanity, how we censure the wisdom of the practice. It might impart a gusto.

I remember an hypothesis, argued upon by the young students, when I was at St. Omer's, and maintained with much learning and pleasantry on both sides, "Whether, supposing that the flavor of a pig who obtained his death by whipping (per flagellationem extremam) superadded a pleasure upon the palate of a man more intense than any possible suffering we can conceive in the animal, is man justified in using that method

of putting the animal to death?" I forget the decision.

His sauce should be considered. Decidedly, a few bread-crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage. But banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shalots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank & guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are—but consider, he is a weakling—a flower.



Here ends "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" by Charles Lamb, one of the essays which first appeared in the London Magazine under the name of Elia and here reprinted from the first edition (1823) with an introduction on "Lamb's Literary Motive" by Cyrus Lauron Hooper. Printed in the Village type at The Village Press, Park Ridge, Illinois, by Fred W. & Bertha M. Goudy, and finished February 29, 1904—the third book issued from the Press.



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Fred W Gundy  
Bertha Gundy





















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