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Hearn, Health, and the Power of Food

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Throughout much of his adult life, the years spent in the United States and Japan, Hearn was deeply interested in the power of food to transform human lives: Food, he said, was the single most powerful motivator of all individuals and societies, securing it the primary goal of all human effort. But it was food's capacity to promote and maintain human health that especially interested him. His early newspaper articles provide evidence of the abundant information, real and apocryphal, which he gathered on abnormal human conditions and what to put into the stomach to remedy them.¹ His personal letters also reveal an unusual breadth and depth of interest in human disease, including the wish that he "had the opportunity to study medicine, or rather, the ability to be a good physician"² and later the hope that his first son Kazuo might one day become a doctor.³

It is not surprising that he was so health conscious. After all, he was the son of a physician, a surgeon in the British Navy, and though he hardly knew his father, it is likely that Hearn inherited from him an ardent interest in medical science. As anyone familiar with Hearn's life knows, he frequently associated with doctors – not only as their patient but as their friend. As he wrote to Dr. George M. Gould in 1887, "it is a singular fact that most of my tried friends have been physicians." His intimacy with several prominent doctors of his day, most notably Dr. Gould of Philadelphia and Dr. Rudolph Matas of New Orleans, significantly influenced Hearn's thought and work. These men, like Hearn himself, considered literature and science to be complimentary modes of inquiry into the mysteries and wonders of life – not diametrically opposed paradigms of thinking. Gould, in fact, wrote numerous literary articles, and he even planned to write a "medical novel" some day, a project in which Hearn took keen interest.⁴ For his part, Hearn helped Gould compile a medical dictionary and wrote several literary pieces on scientific subjects, including an essay on their relationship called "Science and Literature."⁵ Just as these professional medical practitioners were also avid, if amateur, men of letters, Hearn, the professional literary man, enjoyed playing the role of amateur physician. Though none of them achieved the success in both fields that, say, American poet William Carlos Williams did, each in his own way pursued a lifelong interest in sickness as well as syntax.

In addition to the influence, conscious or unconscious, of his father, Hearn was also deeply concerned with his personal health. Always in his mind was the precarious condition of his one good eye, the single most important organ for his literary work. Especially after moving to Japan, it alone gave him access to English- and French-language authors. Other health problems dot the biographical landscape. In New Orleans he suffered from dengue; in Matsue he had severe lung and digestive troubles; in Kobe it was his eye; and in Tokyo his heart became a problem. But perhaps more important for Hearn than any of these particular concerns was the simple matter of vitality, the maintenance of the physical and mental energy without which he could not study or write. And the source of that energy, he believed, was the stomach. For Hearn the stomach was the main organ of health, the place where food, or food-as-medicine, worked its magic. Eating and its effects on health, as I hope to show, was a topic of vital importance to Hearn, and

without an understanding of this aspect of his personality, we overlook a significant dimension of the man.

A popular theme of his early, so-called "gruesome" reportorial work, written largely to shock and titillate newspaper readers, was the medical effects of ingested substances. In a lengthy article for the Cincinnati *Commercial* called "Utilization of Human Remains" (November 7, 1875), Hearn presented a historical survey of incredible uses of the human body by human beings, all gruesome, giving prominence to an extensive report on cannibalism and its dietary consequences. Though many writers had treated the subject before, Hearn's treatment offered the novel touch of a medical evaluation that emphasized the beneficial rather than the harmful effects.

Ever mindful of the medical consequences of ingestion, he relates that although bread made from the bones of disinterred human bodies saved many from starvation during the sixth siege of Paris, "all who ate it became afflicted with strange and hideous disorders which no man had ever before heard of, and which no physician could heal."⁶ In addition to bone-flour bread, eating human flesh was also said to cause "the most hideous, incurable and nameless diseases with which the modern race is afflicted," including a fatally stubborn form of constipation.⁷ However, it is when writing about the unconventional, about the idea that cannibalism can be *healthy*, that he seemed to enjoy himself the most. His treatment of that aspect contains "evidence" (understandably non-statistical) which is quite specific both medically and geographically to suggest that in some cases a diet of human flesh may actually prevent elephantiasis and leprosy.

In the majority of cases the Anthropophagi of the South Seas appear to have flourished on the ghastly diet. The Tahitians, New Zealanders, Tongans, Fijians, New Caledonians and other tribes are remarkable for fine physique; and the diseases of leprosy and elephantiasis which prevail among some of the races of Oceania are not traceable to cannibalism – in fact the said diseases have become far more fatal and widespread in those localities where civilization has crushed out cannibalism. Among some certain tribes of African Anthropophagi, where human flesh is said to be sold in the butchers' shops, leprosy and other odd diseases appear to be unknown.⁸

In addition to the fresh spin of citing specific health benefits, he also tried to raise some eyebrows by sparing no nation or race in the apparent thoroughness of his investigation. Along with the mention of hideous practices by the Celts, French, Turks, Mexicans, Scandinavians, and Hungarians, Hearn casually but pointedly included the English, reporting on "the advocacy of cannibalism by a royal English physician only two centuries ago" who recommended for certain patients a dish made from the flesh of the thighs of a healthy young man who died a natural death in mid-August "to be eaten with spirits of wine and salt;" and also "a recipe for a wonderful tonic, to be made from the blood of a sound young man dying in springtime."⁹ As ever, one of Hearn's purposes was to challenge preconceptions about race, social class, nationality, and religion: even British royalty may have indulged in the consumption of human flesh, albeit for medicinal purposes.

Around this time Hearn had become interested in the health benefits of blood-drinking. He first touched on the habit in a comparative study of slaughter-house practices called "Haceldama" (*Commercial*, September 5, 1875), recommending that only the blood of a humanely and hygienically

slaughtered animal, one butchered in the *kosher* manner of the Hebrews, be imbibed. The effects, Hearn implied, were remarkable.

"We have two ladies and one young man coming here to drink blood," observed a slaughter-house proprietor yesterday. "We used to have a great many more, but they got well and strong and stopped coming. One woman came here for a year, and got wonderfully healthy and fat; she used to be a skeleton, a consumptive skeleton. We always slaughter in the Hebrew way; and the blood of cattle so killed is more healthy. It tastes like new milk from the cow."¹⁰

After hearing this testimony, Hearn drank a glass himself, or so he says, and described it as not only "delicious" but also as "ruddy, vigorous, healthful life—not the essence, but the protoplasmic fluid itself—... and its strength spreads through the veins with the very rapidity of wine."¹¹ It is so good and invigorating, in fact, that it may become addictive. But, he speculates, over-indulgence may be harmful in certain people, producing the mental side-effect of "blood-thirstiness," which may lead to cruel and brutal behavior a la Caligula.¹²

For a while, Hearn seems to have been intrigued by the topic of blood-drinking and health, for less than a year later, in another *Commercial* piece called "A Slaughter-House Story" (July 26, 1876), he revisited the Hebrew slaughter house to report in greater depth on one particular case of blood-drinking for health. This time he wrote up his findings as a kind of medical case study of a man who went temporarily blind after drinking three glasses.

On being asked whether the blood had not made him sick, he said that he had felt very sick before he drank it, but did not feel any nausea afterward, and that now he felt perfectly well. However, he averred that he would not drink so much blood at one time again, because it had made him blind. ... For more than a week afterward, he declared, the difference between night and day was not apparent to him; yet, having recovered his vision, he believed that he could see better than ever.¹³

Next Hearn introduced the expert opinions of two local physicians, who agreed that drinking blood could not cause temporary blindness. However, their opinions differed with regard to the health-benefits of the practice. The first one told Hearn that it was potentially dangerous.

I consider the transfusion of blood, as advocated by Gessellius and others, the reverse of beneficial, and I have always warned my consumptive patients against drinking blood. The latter practice is both morally and physically detrimental. A blood drinker is apt to introduce parasites into his system—cysticerei. ... Now the blood, on reaching the stomach, at once coagulates—the clot being digested like other solid food, and the serum being absorbed. But the cysticerei are not wholly digested. The gastric juice only liberates the animal by destroying its shell covering. It is quite safe, however, to eat 'rare beef,' or underdone meat, as the heat of the fire always destroys the parasites.¹⁴

The second physician, however, regarded fresh cow's blood to be "a splendid medicine for weak and

sickly people . . . because it is, perhaps, the most nutritive food that can be put into the stomach."

Fresh beef-blood is generally healthy. The parasites, which occasionally infest domestic animals, do not live in the blood, but in the flesh. . . . You have heard of the blood-sausages eaten by the German soldiers—they constitute the most nutritious of diet. Of course, in blood-drinking, however, the blood should always be swallowed before it begins to clot.¹⁵⁾

As Paul Murray has pointed out,¹⁶⁾ science, and especially medical science, provided Hearn with wonderful opportunities to disgust and to nauseate with impunity, to describe in sickening detail the sometimes hideous facts of being alive.

When Hearn moved to New Orleans, he became interested in the health problems peculiar to that southern climate. Though he always appreciated the warmth, if not the heat, of tropical locations, he found in New Orleans a concomitant threat to human health, especially to that of newcomers from the North, like himself. This concern coincided with a new sense of himself as a "scientific" writer¹⁷⁾ and prompted him to write his longest sustained essay on the subject of health and medicine, "The Creole Doctor," which appeared in the *New York Tribune*, January 3, 1886. It was a subject Hearn had been considering for some time,¹⁸⁾ and it combined his interest in medicine and personal health with his increasing engrossment in Creole culture. The essay began with a quasi-clinical description of the physiological changes an outsider undergoes in adaptating to Louisiana's summers and the dietary implications of this:

A rosy complexion invariably fades out; the blood partly loses its plasticity, as the proportion of red corpuscles greatly diminishes; . . . the general aspect of the healthiest natives is that of convalescents as compared with the ruddy look of Northern people; and the well-known ivory pallor of the Creole suggests to inexperienced eyes a recent attack of malaria. The changes in blood accompanying acclimatization necessarily involve corresponding changes in regard to diet and habits of life; but while the appetite may be maintained by the use of acidulated drinks, or such gentle stimulants as claret-and-water, one's capacity for intense or prolonged exertion steadily diminishes, and finally passes away.¹⁹⁾

In addition to imbibing certain appetite-inducing drinks, there were numerous other concoctions that the local people ingested to maintain vitality and cure illness, the majority of them contained in a body of Creole folk medicine that most likely originated with African slaves, who passed it on to their masters. Reminiscent of his drinking a glass of cow's blood, Hearn wrote how he himself drank a mysterious potion prepared and administered by a "colored" nurse, and was cured.

[It] was brought to me in a small earthenware jug, piping hot. It was a drink which had a reddish color, an agreeable odor, and an unpleasantly bitter taste. I was told to let the fluid cool before drinking, and not to be frightened at the results, which proved alarming, for dizziness and difficulty of breathing were among them. But the draught restored me to complete health; and I

may say that I felt unusually well for several months subsequently.²⁰

In the mind of the typical Northern white *Tribune* reader, Hearn intended to create a two-fold impact, the first produced by his actual drinking of the potentially dangerous potion, with its frightening side effects and almost magical potency, and the second engendered by the revelation of its origins in darkest Africa. This was a drug unknown to the pharmacopoeia of Western science—secret, black, tribal. When he asked the nurse for the recipe, he was refused, even after offers of money. It was too dangerous, she implied, to be allowed into the hands of a Northern novice.

The rest of the essay focuses mainly on the specific ingredients and indications of similar "simples," or vegetable-based cures, which Hearn had learned about mostly through Dr. and Mrs. Matas. These were primarily "tisanes" or teas, defined by Hearn as "infusions of medicinal herbs obtained by boiling the leaves." Anticipating the long descriptions of Martinique's local foods, their preparation, and health benefits in "Ma Bonne," Hearn again employs his purposefully undecorative "cookbook style," letting the inherent unusualness of the facts themselves entertain. For chills and fever, tea made from pimento leaves, strong black coffee with lemon-juice, and snake-root in whiskey are recommended. (Lemon-juice, an old Creole febrifuge, had been only recently recognized as effective by the International Medical Congress.) For typhoid fever, green coffee berries in whiskey; for sleeplessness, lettuce-leaf tea before bed; for nausea, geranium-leaf tea boiled with "the interior of a fowl's gizzard." For colds, celery-leaf tea with a few drops of paregoric and honey; also castor oil and molasses, or roasted onions with molasses and butter before bed. There is tea made from bay leaves and mint-plant leaves for indigestion; for jaundice melonseed tea. There is also cockroach tea for tetanus and cockroaches fried in oil with garlic for indigestion. The more revolting the preparation, the more interesting for his readers, but to maintain the objective tone of the scientist he included some relatively commonplace ingredients such as carrot juice, "the great remedy . . . efficacious in the extreme." The list goes on and on, giving drinks for diarrhea, heart palpitation, rheumatism, and "overheated blood," made from things like eggshells, pecan bark, bananas, and parsley-root. He ends by imploring ethnologists, folklorists, and medical scientists to learn more about Creole healing practice, which has "evolved by an experience not without serious value"²¹—his wording so fastidiously objective that it is nearly a parody of the scientific style. Although his interest in this type of thing declined later, in Japan he did mention two unusual instances: One was an anecdote about a young wife whose liver was to be cooked and fed to her mother-in-law to restore the old lady's eyesight, and another about geishas who ate crickets to improve their singing voices.

Perhaps the main dietary principle Hearn gleaned in New Orleans was that people from different cultures required different diets to stay healthy. As he had soon found out, in the matter of what and how to eat, New Orleans was definitely not like Cincinnati. First of all, its citizens ate only two meals a day, at around 9 AM and 4 PM. Breakfast was light—coffee, bread, perhaps an egg; dinner was heavier "but far less solid and difficult of digestion" than dinner in the North. In fact, Hearn claimed that any one meal of the day in the North was more nutritious than the entire day's food intake in New Orleans. Secondly, in New Orleans one had to know what to avoid and when, as ignorance of local dietary habits could be extremely hazardous to the health, especially in summer:

It is considered dangerous here to drink much water in summer. For five cents one can get half a

bottle of strong claret, and this you mix with your drinking-water, squeezing a lemon into it. Limes are better, but harder to get. . . .²²⁾

. . . I am afraid another summer here would kill me. I dare not eat meat often, nor fruit,—in fact there are very few things a stranger can eat here with safety in July or August. As for the Creoles, they eat grease and drink olive oil in sickening quantities, but it doesn't seem to hurt them.²³⁾

Thirdly, one had to know *how* to eat. Hearn had eventually found out enough about fruit consumption in New Orleans to author an article for its citizens (*Item*, July 17, 1879). Though it may well have been written simply as "filler" to complete the column length, it nevertheless offers further evidence of the detailed interest Hearn took in healthy eating:

How to Eat Fruit

Now that fruits are becoming plenty and cheap, and so popular as to be in almost everybody's mouth, so to speak, a bit of advice as to the time they should be eaten might not be out of place. We will begin by stating that the earlier in the day the fruits are eaten the better. They should be ripe, fresh and perfect, and if eaten in their natural state, it is almost impossible to eat too much. Their healthful qualities depend on their ripe acidity, but if sweetened with sugar the acidity is not only neutralized, but the stomach is tempted to receive more than it can digest, and if cream is taken with them the labor of digestion is increased.

No liquid of any description should be drunk within an hour after the fruit, nor should anything be eaten within two or three hours—thus time being allowed them to pass out of the stomach, the system derives from them all their enlivening, cooling, and aperient influence. The great rule is, eat fruit and berries while fresh, ripe and perfect, in their natural state, without eating or drinking anything for at least two hours afterward. With these restrictions, fruit may be eaten in moderation during the day and without getting tired of them, or ceasing to be benefited by them during the whole season.²⁴⁾

As Tinker pointed out, around this time Hearn moved to the American district of New Orleans because "the greasiness of the cooking had begun to revolt him," but it wasn't until Japan that the lesson in cross-cultural dining would be truly learned. In Matsue, after ten months of trying (unsuccessfully) to survive on a primarily Japanese diet, he concluded that it was biologically impossible for a non-Oriental to live on Japanese fare. A short while later, he publicly announced what he had suspected all along, that "Just as you cannot feed a hawk on rice or a wolf on straw, you can not keep Western men alive upon Oriental food."²⁵⁾ A healthy diet was relative, after all. It was a lesson he should have learned in New Orleans.

In Japan, too, Hearn's bouts with disease and his interest in optimum health continued unabated, although the issue appeared less frequently in his writings. Still, in several letters it was a main topic of discussion. Of fragile constitution himself, Chamberlain initiated it:

Perhaps true Paradise—for an Anglo-Saxon—would consist in having any amount to do, and illimitable strength to do it with. On the other hand, I do not altogether envy the strong-as-a-horse people. I think they must miss many of the half-lights, and pleasant surprises, and more varied and complex feelings of those who know all kinds of health.²⁶

In his answer, written soon after a spell of severe illness in Matsue, Hearn emphatically agreed with Chamberlain and expounded on the quasi-mystical gratifications of physical infirmity.

It is impossible to see the psychical undercurrents of human existence without that self-separation from the purely physical part of being, which severe sickness gives—like a revelation. One in good health, who has never been obliged to separate his immaterial self from his material self, always will imagine that he understands much which, even in recorded words, cannot be understood at all without sharp experience. . . . All the history of asceticism and self-suppression as a religion, appears to me founded upon a vague, blundering, intuitive recognition of the terrible and glorious fact, that we can reach the highest life only through that self-separation which the experiences of illness, that is, the knowledge of physical weakness, brings; perfect health always involves the domination of the spiritual by the physical—at least in the present state of human evolution.²⁷

"Bodily decrepitude is wisdom," wrote Yeats in "After Long Silence"; it was a message Hearn instinctively understood. But Hearn saw the idea as involving not only a physical/spiritual dichotomy but also a north/south one. The idea re-emerges in a subsequent letter to Chamberlain penned from Kumamoto, where he was enjoying the warmth and health of that New Orleans southern climate:

Isn't Lowell much like those tropical fruits that are ripened only by sun? He has had none of the frost of life to sweeten him. Tropical fruits, you know, are terribly disappointing—though very lovely to the eye. You must go North, and far North, to get the fruits that have the true rich flavour and nutritive force. They have been ripened by sharp winds and frosts. So with men, is n't it? The man who has not suffered, has had only half of his nervous system developed. He can touch and feel life on one side only.²⁸

Though he may have believed that his own sufferings had helped to make him a more sensitive, spiritually enlightened writer, nonetheless he prized good physical health. The frigid North was fine for producing good fruit and for improving writers like Percival Lowell, but he himself wished always to live in a tropical climate, the hotter the better, and the dream of living in Manila was never far from his thoughts. For Hearn, sickness and cold climates and Japanese food were ultimately *disciplinary*, valuable only as temporary things. As permanent circumstances, he considered all three to be unequivocally deleterious to his well-being.

The matter of mental vitality was arguably the single most important consideration in his life, and his deep faith in the ability of good nutrition to provide it never wavered. This is perhaps most clearly

expressed in his dedication to Mrs. Courtney, "by whose generous care and unselfish providing I recovered that health of mind and body without which no literary work can be accomplished." In 1886, he had passed on a more specific version of this advice to his ailing friend, W.D. O'Connor:

Rare beefsteaks--eggs just warmed--and claret and water to stimulate appetite as often as possible, are important. . . . The main thing--*please do not doubt it*--is plenty of nourishment, cultivation of appetite, and much sleep. Then Nature will right herself--slowly, though surely.²⁹¹

Indeed, this is how Hearn had recovered, thanks to Mrs. Courtney's dining room and to the one Western restaurant in Matsue, and he was now totally converted to the theory, also advocated by Herbert Spencer, that the stomach needs high-octane fuel to provide sufficient "nutritive force" to overcome fatigue or disease and to furnish mental vigor. Thus, when Chamberlain complained of feeling too weak to work, he confidently advised him to do as he had done:

Of course it follows to reason that when the physical vitality runs low, the mental power for consecutive effort must become feeble; the reserve of both forces is the same. The nerve batteries must be left to fill themselves slowly; and the filling often takes a long time. . . . Besides I would indulge myself if I were you. A good digestion means that everything is possible. "Avec ca, on se refait toujours," said a French adviser once. If I were you I would give that digestion plenty of work with claret and beef and puddings and pies and liqueurs. And I would smoke cigars; and I would drink brandy. And I would not allow myself even to think of work till the surplus of returning strength--and nothing else--made work absolutely necessary. Of course, all this is mere repetition of my own experience--and perhaps to you, mere verbiage. But I can't help suspecting that you do not allow yourself all the mere bodily gratification that you might allow yourself with good results. I think so because you told me that, although when I dined with you, you lived superbly, that when alone it is your habit to eat very little. So with all scholars, perhaps. But I wish you would cultivate the physical only, for a time. Perhaps no doctor ever told you this; but it is a curious fact in my own experience--a man can scientifically triple the assimilating capacity of his stomach. And that means tripling the storage of physical force within himself. I could tell you extraordinary things but I fear to bore you; and indeed I would not have said all this but for my anxiety at hearing that you feel vitally low. Wherefore I talked of Nature, the greatest nurse, who brought me back to strength twice after the doctors declared me doomed, and I was able to eat only one raw egg a day.³⁰¹

An organism's energy, then, was dose-dependent upon the amount of nutrition in the diet; thus, a bigger stomach, like a bigger engine, implied the possibility of greater horsepower. Hearn was giving what he considered to be valuable medical advice, secrets from his New Orleans days that even the doctors were unaware of, but Chamberlain was equally committed to an antithetical approach.

Part of your last almost made me laugh out-loud by reason of the quaintness of the total contradiction between your preaching and my practice. Pies, liqueurs, brandy, big cigars forsooth!

for *this* child, whose views on eating are to have, say, a little bit of chicken and some tapioca pudding, then for the next day's tiffin the other wing of the chicken and perhaps a little rice and stewed fruit, and so on, from meal to meal, until at last the chicken becomes a thing of the past, and then *da cape* with something equally modest and dowager-like! And then, when I have people, the standing orders to the boy are to give me half helps! And *never*, NEVER anything unwholesome. Lobster, pork, almonds,—away with such unholy thoughts! And yet I can assure you that the tapioca doctrine has esoteric joys of which the outer world knows naught. Virtue *is* its own reward. . . . I believe you are just as much in the right as I am. A good "bust" on occasion clears the atmosphere. . . . I merely describe a situation, and invite you also to laugh over the comical contrast between the patient's habits and the proposed remedy.³¹

But Hearn was far too disappointed to laugh. Instead of Chamberlain's heartfelt appreciation, he had got in reply what he had least expected—laughter, which he took to mean derision. The issue of diet was so serious and important to him that the lightness of Chamberlain's attitude, his seemingly flippant response, deeply wounded his pride and even threatened their friendship. How ruffled Hearn's feathers became is clear in the reply.

I suppose my letter about eating must have seemed very simple to you; but it was prompted by ideas which your answer confirms. I had a very charming friend, Charles Gayarre, the Louisiana historian . . . ; he used to eat so carefully that everything was weighed for him. But his trouble was in regard to digestion. When you told me you had no trouble of that sort, I at once suggested the opposite policy—because it succeeded twice in my own case, and for another reason. It seems to me that we conquer anything which takes a chronic form only by a surplus of physical force in ourselves; and how a man can get such a surplus while he eats like a butterfly, I can't imagine. I mean I can't understand the scientific principle behind the treatment you follow. So, being anxious, perhaps I said some "simple" things.³²

Ever the believer in "scientific principle," Hearn felt that in addition to his personal struggles with disease, his several associations with medical men and the numerous scientific articles he had penned had outfitted him with more than a layman's knowledge of human physiology. As his emphasis on the word "simple" suggests, it was Chamberlain's implication that Hearn lacked scientific *sophistication* that seemed to irk him.

Chamberlain tried to end the spat in his next letter. He explained that his laughter was not directed at Hearn, and he tried to demote the issue's importance by relegating it to the status of a postscript:

[PS] I did not think your eating advice "Simple." When I wrote I was not laughing at *it*, but only at the quaint differences which circumstances, for the most part accidental, create between men's tastes and habits.—More of this another time.³³

But there was never to be another time. As a topic, the stomach and what to put in it was effectively dropped. Their friendship continued, but the injury to the pride of one as sensitive as Hearn may not have

been so easily forgotten. Insulting Hearn was one thing, but doubting the principles of Spencer, whose mind Hearn almost literally worshipped, was another, for it was the great philosopher himself who verified everything Hearn had said.

As Herbert Spencer has pointed out, the degree of human energy, physical or intellectual, must depend upon the nutritiveness of food; and history shows that the well-fed races have been the energetic and the dominant. Perhaps mind will rule in the future of nations; but mind is a mode of force, and must be fed – through the stomach.³⁴

How could the "tapioca doctrine" fuel vigorous brainwork? To Spencer and to Hearn, "well-fed" meant an ample, steady diet of rich, heavy food – "beef and puddings and pies and liqueurs" – which contained abundant "nutritive force" for the stomach to assimilate. A steady diet of such food conferred upon the individual not only superior physical strength but, more importantly, superior mental capacity, the latter impossible without the former.³⁵

The thoughts that have shaken the world were never framed upon bread and water; they were created by beefsteak and mutton-chops, by ham and eggs, by pork and puddings, and were stimulated by generous wines, strong ales, and strong coffee.³⁶

This assumption that a greater intake of higher "octane" fuel yielded a correspondingly higher output of physical and mental power, was tantamount to claiming supremacy for the Western races. If food determined strength, and if the amount of power generated by the stomach, great or small, determined the nature of a people and their place in world society, then Japan according to Hearn was "small" – not inferior necessarily, but definitely smaller than the West in scale and power. This was borne out by observation.

Smallness, after all, is the word. . . . After all, what is there large in Japan except Fuji, and the ranges? What has man made that is large? What has he done that is large? What does he think that is large? What does he feel that is large? His gods are ghosts only – who eat tiny, tiny, tiny repasts. His cities are vast collections of wooden huts. His temples are scarcely better. His castles are mere timber barricades.

And very small his imaginations are. His poems, which are only tiny pictures? – his deepest sentiments of heroism which he shares with the ant and the wasp! – his romances, mediaevally tiresome, yet without any of the strength of our own mediaevalism! Always details – details infinite in number and variety, infinitesimal in character. And to-day, what is his tendency? To make everything that he adopts small – philosophy, sciences, material, arts, machinery; – everything is modified in many ways, but uniformly diminished for Lilliput. And Lilliput is not tall enough to see far. Cosmic emotions do not come to Lilliputians. Did any Japanese ever feel such an emotion? Will any ever feel one?

Small, yes. A common observation among Western observers of the day. But, after all, how much did

size really matter? Hearn often wondered about, and sometimes seemed to agonize over, the question of human values that size implied.

...—how enormous the difference in *volume* of life. We are *Brobdignagians*! And yet, perhaps, the future is to these races! The age of giant feelings, like the age of giant mammals, may be succeeded by an era of smaller life—a life without dreams and aspirations above the material. . . .

But in a purely, hopelessly industrial age, what would be the use of dreams? And that age is coming. Then the men who are giants will all starve to death; and the earth will be peopled by the extremely small, and governed by extremely small ideas.³⁷⁾

Small, but fitter to survive because bio-mechanically more efficient. Hearn used the Spencer-inspired metaphor of body-as-machine and stomach-as-engine to reach a similar conclusion in *The Future of the Far East*: "The human body is, after all, an engine;—the fuel by which it runs is food. . . . Well, the Western body may be compared to an engine of a certain power; and the Eastern body to another. If you imagine them able to do exactly the same amount of work,—their relative value must be determined by the cost of their fuel."³⁸⁾ But blessed with a marvelous stomach that could run on much cheaper fuel, "whose chemistry can extract ample nourishment from food on which no European could live," the Oriental races would eventually "underlive" the Occidental races, thus winning a possible future global competition for survival. Thus, for all their magnificence, the great thoughts and the great thinkers may be merely the dinosaurs of human history, doomed to ultimate extinction. The "small," meek, grain-eating races would truly inherit the earth.

Though he felt that students in Japan, who ate only rice and gruel, were "not sufficiently strong and sufficiently nourished to bear the tremendous strain put upon [them] at the higher schools,"³⁹⁾ he was also acutely aware of the dangers of the opposite extreme—too much rich food. In this belief he may have been influenced by some of the emerging, "new" health prescriptions being popularized in 19th century America. Among those who advised against too rich a diet were Catharine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who strongly opposed over-eating and excessive stimulation of the appetite. Gluttonous binges and over-gorging, which Hearn said had worked for him when he was weak, were to be strictly avoided. Sylvester Graham, a 19th century American vegetarian who advocated whole grains and natural ingredients, believed that meat, alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea overstimulated the organs of digestion. Hearn, as we know, was of another school; he loved all of these gustatory pleasures and was convinced they were generally necessary to produce the physical and mental power that enabled him to write.

The case for whole grains and unrefined foods was reiterated by Dio Lewis in his 1872 book, *Our Digestion; or, My Jolly Friend's Secret*. Also in that popular treatise he claimed that most diseases were attributable to improper eating and that sound digestion was the key to optimum health: "we have only one stomach, and when that fails, the whole body must fail."⁴⁰⁾ Lewis's emphasis on the importance of the stomach corroborated Hearn's advice to Chamberlain that a good digestion meant "all things are possible." However, whereas Lewis advocated grains to maintain good digestion, Hearn was silent on the issue.

But when one's digestion was weak, as with his friend Charles Gayerre, or in a state of disuse due to

an absence of food, Hearn claimed that eating to satiation was unhealthy: "After rescue, a castaway enjoys too much the food offered; a physician stands by to prevent him eating enough."⁴¹ But even in a healthy person, an *overabundance* of rich food could cause indigestion and constipation. This was an idea he had once expressed in an article for the *Item* (1878) on social problems in England, called "The Future of A Great Nation." There he cautioned against the ill social effects of a monetary diet that was too rich:

The natural consequence to the nation of this overgorging of gold, is much the same as the consequence to a healthy individual of indulgence in a superabundance of rich food—indigestion and constipation. The bowels of commerce need medical attention; but the doctor is seldom to be found; in this comparison the individual system has advantages over the social system. The latter needs a really competent financial philosopher, who of all beings in the world is the most difficult to find; the former needs only the advice of an apothecary or ordinary physician. Sometimes, however, the nation finds its doctor, but only when the evil is slight, tangible and easily managed. Nature generally does for the nation what pills and purgatives do for the individual.⁴²

This analogy between the functions of a nation's commerce and those of the human digestive system was borrowed from John William Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (1863), which Hearn had read (in addition to Hume) in researching the essay. In social science as in medical science, concluded Hearn, the overstuffed system must "purge" its excessive population to get well; thus "emigration alone can really relieve England at the present time."⁴³

In addition to advising friends like O'Connor and Chamberlain, Hearn also gave dietary advice to his son. In a story told to Kazuo for an English lesson, he warned the young boy of the dangers of an unbalanced menu.

In Switzerland, very wicked men are sent to prison for life. In the prison these wicked men get only meat to eat, and only wine to drink. The meat and wine are very good. But the wicked men soon get sick and die. It is very bad to eat only one thing.⁴⁴

Although belief in the benefits of a varied diet was common in Hearn's day, he put the notion to unusual imaginative use in "The Little Red Kitten," one of his so-called "Fantastics." The kitten of the title eats a stupefying variety of strange combinations such as "beefsteak and cockroaches, caterpillars and fish, chicken and butterflies, mosquito-hawks and roast mutton," until it had consumed almost every type of creature imaginable. "On this diet," Hearn announced, "it soon acquired strength to whip all the ancient cats in the neighborhood."⁴⁵ The well-executed humorous effect aside, Hearn was clearly endorsing the idea that a widely varied menu promotes a strong physical constitution. Kazuo, eat your vegetables.

Ironically, despite his knowledge of and concern with what and how to eat for maximum health, Hearn died of, among other things, a lifetime of generally unhealthy gastronomy. As Yozo Kakuta has pointed out, he took plenty of eggs and red meat and other highly nutritive foods unstintingly to get the mental force he needed for his work, but this was unwittingly at the expense of his heart and arteries.⁴⁶ He

died at age 54, rather young even for his time, from a heart attack that might have been forestalled, if not prevented, by a diet closer to that of Chamberlain.

In her reminiscences, Setsu told an anecdote about Hearn's reaction to hearing about an old Japanese peer who abhorred Western customs. "I simply adore a person like that," he said. "He would be one of my best friends. . . . I have nothing Western about me." She answered, "You may have nothing Western about you, but look at your nose!" "Oh!" he replied. "What can I do with my nose? Pity me because of this, for I, Koizumi Yakumo, truly love Japan more than any Japanese."⁴⁷ At times Hearn was achingly conscious of being unable to become completely Japanese, despite his Japanese name and citizenship papers. He had failed to live on Japanese food, could not master the language, and though he was sometimes mistaken for an "ai no ko" (half-Japanese) he simply looked different. But in another sense, Japan was also unable to digest Hearn: he and others like him were the Western food that Japan could chew for a while, but could not easily swallow or digest. When mockingly told by school officials that he should learn to live on rice like a Japanese, he felt spat out. Even one who loved Japan so much could not feel Japanese here.

Professor Maggie Kilgour explains the situation of an exile like Hearn with a metaphor of incorporation:

This is the worst fate imaginable to a Greek of Homer's time: to be an alien, a *barbaros* in exile forever. To eat in a country is potentially to be eaten by it, to enter into a false identification by being absorbed by a foreign culture—what we call "going native"—and so be prevented from returning to a place of origin in which one is truly at home. The opposite of returning to one's own hearth is ultimately to be subsumed totally by a hostile host.⁴⁸

Hearn, however, was not subsumed, though he wanted to be, and he did not have a clear place of origin where he felt "truly at home." Nor was he an ancient Greek, although he was half-Greek by birth, nor was Japan a "hostile" host, at least not openly. Still, the metaphor of eating fits well the situation of Hearn in Meiji Japan: Soon after arriving, Hearn eagerly hoped to ingest and be ingested by Japan, to absorb and be absorbed by the people and culture he had begun to love. For Hearn, unlike the ancient Greek wanderers, the tragedy may have been that he could *not* eat it or be eaten by it, though he desperately wanted both. His own stomach could not "go native," and Japanese culture also would not let him—at least not completely.

But I believe Hearn was fairly contented when he died. He had secured the financial welfare of his family; he had written much of what he wanted to say about Japan; despite certain disillusion, he still loved Japan and its people; and on his deathbed he was probably more "at home" with his family in Tokyo than he would have been with any other people in any other place. "Ah, byoki no tame!" ("Ah, on account of sickness!") he is supposed to have said just before he died. I believe that Hearn, after a lifetime of investigating human disease and death, would not have been surprised at all to realize that he was going to die from disease as opposed to, say, an accident. Moreover, this was not the first time he had had a heart attack in the recent past. But each time he had recovered. This time, he was telling them, it felt different; he was not getting better. Is it not possible that in his weakened state, his pronunciation of Japanese

perhaps a trifle unclear, he actually said, "Ah, byoki, mo dame!" ("Ah, the sickness, this time it's no good!")?

Setsu had helped him to bed, but there was little else she could do; there was no black nurse with a magical potion he could drink. According to Kazuo,⁴⁹ the last thing he put in his stomach was a glass of Western whiskey, to ease the pain in his tired, constricted Japanese heart. And once more Hearn entered into yet another foreign world, perhaps finally at home.

Notes

- 1) For the *Commercial* Hearn wrote numerous articles pertaining to the condition and care of the human body. For example, "The Opium Habit," "Opium Eating," "Invisible Poisons," "Myopia," "Eye-Transplantation," "The Leech," "A Case of Lunacy," "The Teeth and Some Curious Facts in Dentistry," and "Natural Bone Setting."
- 2) *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926, Volume XIV, p. 21 (hereafter cited as *Works*). Letter to George M. Gould, 1887.
- 3) "However, this is the practical age—there is nothing for philosophers, poets, or painters to succeed in, unless they are independently situated. I shall try to make a good doctor out of Kaji, if I can." Letter to his sister, Mrs. Atkinson, 6/2/1894, reprinted in Nina Kennard, *Lafcadio Hearn, His Life and Work*, London: Eveleigh Nash, 1911, p. 261. Examples of health discussions in the letters are *Works*, XIII, 343-34 and 362-63 (to W.D. O'Connor, 1886). To H.E. Krehbiel he writes, "By the way, would you like a copy of De l'sere's work on diseases of the voice. . . ? I have a copy for you." *Works*, XIII, 360.
- 4) In a letter to Gould (1887) Hearn wrote: "Apropos of a medical novel, again—have you had occasion to remark the fact that among the French, every startling discovery in medicine or those sciences akin to medicine, is almost immediately popularized by a capital story? The best of those I have seen appeared in the "Revue Politique et Litteraire" and in the "Revue des Deux Mondes." *Works*, XIV, 22.
- 5) Hearn ostensibly ghost-wrote an article for Gould, who received \$25 for it. See Oscar Lewis, *Hearn and His Biographers: The Record of a Literary Controversy*, San Francisco: The Westgate Press, 1930, p.91. The essay "Science and Literature" appears in *Essays in European and Oriental Literature*. (See the General Index to the Japanese translation of the *Collected Works*, ed. Zenimoto et al., Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1988, p.22).
- 6) "Utilization of Human Remains" in *American Miscellany*, Vol. 1, ed. Albert Mordell, New York: Dodd, Meed, and Co., 1924, p. 101. Other bizarre medical practices included "powdered skulls . . . given as medicine by medieval physicians" as well as the "bones of a young man who had not been dead more than a year."
- 7) *Ibid.*, 102.
- 8) *Ibid.*, 102.
- 9) *Ibid.*, 104. Hearn may be referring to the notorious royal physician, Dr. Dee, although he lived not "two" but three centuries before Hearn. (For this suggestion I am indebted to Farrell Cleary.)
- 10) "Haceldama," *Period of the Gruesome*, ed. Jon Hughes, Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1990, p. 198.
- 11) *Ibid.*, 198.
- 12) *Ibid.*, 198-99.
- 13) "A Slaughter-House Story," *Period of the Gruesome*, p. 239.
- 14) *Ibid.*, 239-40.
- 15) *Ibid.*, 240.
- 16) Paul Murray also recognizes that for Hearn "science was essential to the creative process as it furnished 'a startling variety of images, symbols, and illustrations.'" *A Fantastic Journey*, Kent: Japan Library, 1993, p. 75.
- 17) "By the way, I have become scientific—I write nearly all the scientific editorials for our paper." *Works*, XIII, 273. Letter to H.E. Krehbiel, 9/1883.
- 18) "Someday I must write something about the physiological changes produced here by climate." *Ibid.*, 273.
- 19) "The Creole Doctor," *Occidental Gleanings*, p.195.
- 20) *Ibid.*, 200.

- 21) *Ibid.*, 208.
- 22) *Works*, XIII, 165. Letter to H.E. Krehbiel. 1878.
- 23) Tinker, Edward Larocque, *Lafcadio Hearn's American Days*. London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1925, pp.190-91. Letter to a friend written from New Orleans, Vieux Carre'.
- 24) *The Daily City Item*, 7/17/1879. Microfilm copy courtesy of Tulane University Library.
- 25) "The Future of the Far East," in *Some New Letters and Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. Ichikawa Sanki, Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1925, p. 398.
- 26) *More Letters from Basil Hall Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn*, compiled by Kazuo Koizumi, Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1937, p. 19. Hereafter referred to as *More Letters*.
- 27) *Works*, XIV, 135-36.
- 28) *Works*, XVI, 108-09. Letter to Chamberlain, 1/30/94
- 29) *Works*, XIII, 362-63. Letter to W.D. O'Connor, 4/1886.
- 30) *Works*, XV, 453-54. Letter to Chamberlain, 6/27/93.
- 31) *Letters from Basil Hall Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn*, compiled by Kazuo Koizumi, Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1936, pp. 24-26, 4/7/93.
- 32) *Works*, XV, 457. Letter to Chamberlain, 7/7/93.
- 33) *More Letters*, p.88. 7/12/93.
- 34) *Works*, VI, 129. "From the Diary of an English Teacher," *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*. Though Hearn often mentions Spencer's *First Principles*, it is actually in *Principles of Biology* that we find a clearer explanation of the phenomenon Hearn refers to here: "We conclude, then, that in the human race, as in all other races, such absolute or relative abundance of nutriment . . . is accompanied by a high rate of genesis. [II, 483]. . . more abundant food simultaneously aggrandizes the individual and adds to the production of new individuals . . . Creatures of the same species notoriously differ in goodness of constitution. Here there is some visceral defect . . . , while here some peculiarity of organic balance, some high quality of tissue, some abundance or potency of the digestive juices, gives to the system a perpetual high tide of rich blood, that serves at once to enhance the vital activities and to raise the power of propagation." Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology, Volume II*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886, p. 490.
- 35) "Please be always careful of the body, without which the mind can do nothing, at least not in this world. The stronger you keep yourself, the clearer your mind will be, and the more vigorous and quick to understand all things." *Some New Letters and Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 181. Letter to Masanobu Otani.
- 36) "From the Diary of an English Teacher," *Works*, VI, 128-29.
- 37) *Works*, XVI, 114-17. Letter to Chamberlain, 2/2/1894.
- 38) "The Future of the Far East," *Some New Letters and Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, p.397.
- 39) *Works*, XIV, 207. Letter to Nishida, 1/15/93.
- 40) Lewis, Dio, *Our Digestion; or, My Jolly Friend's Secret*. Philadelphia and Boston: George Maclean, 1872. From the Internet cite of the University of Toledo Libraries, Physical Fitness and Nutrition, pp.2-5.
- 41) *Works*, XVI, 226-27. Letter to Chamberlain, 7/20/1894.
- 42) "The Future of a Great Nation," *Occidental Gleanings, Vol. II*, p.113.
- 43) *Ibid.*, 115.
- 44) Koizumi Kazuo, *Re-Echo*. Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1957, p.113. He also advised the boy not to eat the seeds of oranges, or a tree would grow in his stomach and strangle him!
- 45) *Works*, II, 220. From the *Daily Item*, 9/24/1879.
- 46) Kakuta Yozo, "Haan no Shoku Seikatsu" (Hearn's Eating Habits), in *Herun*, No. 29, Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1992, p. 25 (in Japanese).
- 47) Koizumi Setsuko, *Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918, p. 55.
- 48) Kilgour, Maggie, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, Princeton University Press. 1990, p.23.
- 49) Koizumi Kazuo, *Father and I: Memories of Lafcadio Hearn*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935, p.205.