

GOD and EVIL.

A Conversation with Martin.

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GOD AND NATURE.

We had spent a pleasant day in the hills — my friend Martin and I — and discussed every topic under the sun from sporting results to spiritual realities. He brought me home, at last, to his own house, and we sat out on his verandah in the summer evening. For a time we were silent, both, I think, enjoying the quiet beauty of the hour as we watched the sun sink behind the woods. Then he knocked out his pipe, and turned to me.

“You know, John,” he said, “I’ve heard you argue very convincingly about the existence of God — and I’ll admit you have reason on your side. But for a lot of ‘infidels’ like me, the question isn’t whether God exists, but what sort of a Being He is. I know your Christian answer — you say, ‘He’s good, just, and loving.’ Very well, but all I can say is, I see precious little sign of these qualities you attribute to Him in the world around us.”

“You don’t agree with Traherne,” I said — and quoted: “His goodness is manifest in making that beauty so delightful and its varieties so profitable, the air to breathe in, the sea for moisture, the earth for fertility, the heavens for influences, the sun for productions, the stars and trees for innumerable uses . . .”

“A lot of hooey,” he answered bluntly. “I agree with Richard Jefferies, who says there is nothing human in nature. Man can wrest a living from it, but it will let him perish from cold or hunger. The sun is merciless to the victim who is dying of thirst in an open boat or in the desert. We are the prey of animals, of one another, of poisons, of diseases — and it would make no difference, so far as our earth is concerned, if we were blotted out in this very hour. The stars would move on and the earth with them, in their appointed courses.

“You say that nature is beautiful — I say that the beauty that exists is often short-lived, and has been bought by ages of waste and destruction in the process of development. And it exists side by side with hideous horror and pain, human pain, animal pain. If your God exists, He must be more like Shiva the Destroyer, whom India worships, than the benevolent Being of Christian dreams. If He were good and almighty, He could have prevented evil; so it seems He is either not almighty — as some modern philosophers hold — or simply indifferent to our moral codes and values.”

“Well, Martin,” I said, “I think you’ve put up a solid case for me to answer. In the first place, no Christian apologist who knows his business will pretend to give a complete solution to the mystery of evil. But what I will say to begin with, is that your solution of an ‘immoralist’ God is untenable. Whatever the answer may be — and there are hints and fragments which suggest a real answer beyond our present reach — that is just impossible.”

“So you say. But what’s wrong with it?”

THE MORAL INSTINCT.

“The first thing that’s wrong is your own sense of justice. Why should you regard evil as a ‘problem’ at all, if you are part of a universe in which good and evil are on the same

footing? Why should you be indignant about the suffering of the innocent, and the wasting of beauty, and the cruelty and injustice of men?"

"I see your point," said Martin. "Certainly we do seem to have the idea that the world we live in ought to be good — that evil and waste are disorderly, not part of an ideal system of order. But isn't that accounted for very simply by the herd-instinct which man has, and which he has developed through ages of education?"

"Sorry, old boy," I said, "but it won't work. We have instincts for food, sex, parental affection, and so on, that we can all recognise . . . and also a herd instinct, and an instinct for self-preservation. But the moral sense doesn't work in the least like any of these when it makes judgments of value. As we know of it in our own lives, it stands towards instincts as a player to a piano — urging, but not coercing us — to use one impulse or to restrain another. It can't, then, be just another note on the piano. It doesn't always work in the direction of 'self-preservation' — or why do we admire and glory self-sacrifice, as we all do, Christians and pagans, when it's for a cause that we believe to be worthy? And it doesn't always work for our own herd — else why are we able to see that unrestrained patriotism can be immoral when it is exerted at the expense of humanity?"

"Well, I suppose the life of the race is what the moral instinct really serves."

"Yes," I replied, "but not unconditionally. We recognise a different value in ways of life for mankind — we want to have them 'saved' in a different sense from being simply able to feed as well and live as long and as comfortably as possible. We want them to have truth and beauty in their living."

"But in all this you are describing man's moral ideas as they have emerged after ages of education in human social convention," said Martin.

"I don't think you get me," I answered. "Of course, everyone has to learn the human way of living and thinking from parents and teachers, and so on; but you can't work on something that isn't there — and if there was no moral sense in man to begin with, there could be no moral culture."

"I believe a psycho-analyst once claimed that the 'moral experience' had come from a prehistoric man who had killed his father; but if killing his father made him feel guilty, he already had a sense of values. If a sheep or calf or cat killed its father, it wouldn't have a moral experience about it."

"REAL" MORALITY AND DIVINE GOODNESS.

"Very well, then," said Martin. "I'll grant that we have a moral sense, which tells us that good is according to the world order, and evil contrary to it. But the only trouble is that different peoples have quite different ideas about what good and evil are — just as they have different clothes and customs. So how can all this chaos of different codes point towards a Real Morality, or a God who cares for justice?"

"You make too much of the difference, I think. Now think! All the human moralities agree in the general approval of such things as courage, gratitude, loyalty, and self-restraint. But even if you look at the differences, they testify to the existence of a real standard of value. We say 'this moral idea is an advance on that one,' don't we? Well, how do we measure them? Obviously, by a 'Real Right' which is independent of what people think; a right which is more nearly approached by one code than by another."

"You made a point there, certainly, and how do you sum up the situation?"

"I conclude thus: that there is in man a valuing sense which is the basis of his moral judgements; that this sense cannot be regarded as a mere animal instinct or an expression of personal will, or a matter of human custom. We cannot think about the world at all without using it constantly, and it tells us that the good and just things ought to be, and that evil and injustice are corrosive blots on the face of the universe, a disturbance of the World Order. If we talk about life in any other way it simply doesn't make sense."

"If we are not to despair of thought entirely, then, we must admit that this rule of thought corresponds to reality — and it cannot do so if the Power behind reality is evil, or indifferent as between good and evil."

“In fact, my Shiva is a false god?”

“Yes — in spite of all the sin and evil of the world, God is good.”

THE CASE FOR DUALISM.

The afterglow of the sunset was fading, and it began to grow chilly. “What about adjourning to my study?” said Martin. “Martha will have lit the fire by now — and I’ve got some sherry I’d like you to taste. I’ve got warmed up to this business about evil, and I want to get some more points cleared up while we’re on it.”

I assented warmly, and we made our way to a pleasant room, well lined with books, with a glowing fire in the grate. Martin’s big setter, Bruce, got up to offer us a dignified welcome, but quietly settled again when he had been patted on the head. The cat, on the opposite side of the hearth, stretched her claws and yawned, but paid no further attention to us. Martin filled two glasses from a decanter, and invited me to draw my chair up closer to the fire. There was a low table between us on which he placed the wine, so that he could reach it without interrupting our conversation. We sipped — I indicated appreciation — and Martin took up the tale.

“Look here,” he said, “isn’t it conceivable that the old Persian idea might be right — that there are two Gods, one good and one bad?”

“I think you’ll find,” I replied, “that the objection to that view is about the same as that against your Shiva-god without morals.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, your two Divine Powers are both independent and everlasting, each equal to the other. One stands for love, the other for hatred; one for justice, the other for injustice, and so on. One is a maker, the other a destroyer. To begin with, it’s difficult to see how either could achieve any creative act, since it would immediately be cancelled by the other. However, letting that pass, let’s return to your own outlook. Have you any doubt about which side you ought to be on?”

“The good God’s, of course.”

“You’re sure it’s not just a matter of personal taste; that every man ought to be on the good side? That the other is wrong?”

“Certainly, it’s wrong by definition — since it’s the side of the bad.”

“But don’t you see, Martin, that when you say that, you’re setting up the old standard of value again, a rule which one of your two great spirits conforms to, the other, not? That means that they are both subject to a Higher Law: the law of the Power that made this standard . . . and that Power is good. You can have a rebel angel, or a rebel man, but not a rebel God equal to the good God.”

ALL-POWER AND EVIL.

“Very well, then,” said Martin. “I’ll give you that point, too, and we’ll go on to the next. It’s all very well saying that you can’t have an immoral God, or two Gods; but it seems equally absurd to me to suppose an Almighty good God who has created a world full of evil and sin . . . yet that’s how it is, isn’t it?”

“I think the best way I can answer you is to ask you to look rather more closely at the meaning of two terms you have used — ‘evil’ and ‘almighty’.

“This ‘Evil’ isn’t a positive thing, you know — and by that I don’t mean it isn’t real; but that it depends on the goodness it spoils. It means, in the physical order, a deficiency of some sort due to wrong relationship, or to some necessary element of good being lacking. You say ‘So-and-so has an ugly nose.’ What do you mean? That its shape, or colour, or size, makes it out of the right order in relation to his face? It is too red, for instance. This strong redness is not bad as a colour; in a flower, or a fruit, it might appear charming, but

not in a nose.

“Similar reflections might be made if it is thick, or long, or turned up.

“Again, when you say a man is hungry, or starving, you mean his body is suffering from not having something it needs. The hunger exists in virtue of the good body which it ravages. And so you can go on. Sickness happens when germs get into what is, for them, the right place, but for us, the wrong one — or when growth takes place where it shouldn't or doesn't where it should — or in cases, where some gland secretes too little or too much — or, finally, when your material structure comes up against something in its environment which interferes with its well-being. The germ considered as a living organism, is good, the function of growth is good in itself, glands and their secretions are essential to your bodily well-being, so is the external world of matter. Evil is parasitic on these good things; it arises through the relationship between them; and can have no existence apart from them.”

“Yes, I get that.”

“Well, now; what do you mean by ‘Almighty’ when you're speaking of God?”

“That He can do anything, of course.”

“Such as making a round-square or a free slave?”

“No — not that.”

“And why not?”

“Those aren't things to be made — they're just nonentities — combinations of word which have no meaning . . . it's not a limitation of God's power to say that nonsense is nonsense, and that putting ‘God can’ in front of it leaves it still nonsense . . . “

“Well, then, what about miracles — like making an axe-head swim, like in the Old Testament — or removing a mountain, or curing a man instantly?”

“I'm not saying I believe in miracles, but I suppose that's not the same, is it? These things are not impossible in themselves, in the same way as nonsense. God could uphold the iron by His power, so that the law of gravitation did not work on it; and he could telescope the process of a cure into an instant, or create new tissues of flesh and bone if wanted. And if a man can lift and set down a stone, I don't see why God couldn't lift and set down a hill — if He chose. I doubt if He would — but that's an-other thing entirely”

MAN AND THE WORLD OF NATURE.

“All right, then — we've got our minds clear, now, about these two points of Almightyness and evil. Let's see how they affect the created world. God has chosen to create a number of conscious beings who have to live together and communicate with one another; for this to happen they must be able to distinguish each other — that is, they must know themselves from inside and perceive others outside themselves. Now for this to happen, all those who live together must live in a ‘neutral field’ — an external world which provides them with the means of communicating with each other.”

“You mean, if they acted directly on each other, they couldn't be sure of the difference between their own minds and other people's?”

“That's it. Now, with us this field is the world of matter. If, as we Christians hold, there's an angelic society, they have a quite different kind of field, no doubt; but it fulfils the same function. And when I say it's ‘neutral’ I mean that we can all use it, but none of us can control it entirely. You can see why. If any one of us had complete power to control

the ‘field’, the rest would have no power over it at all — his full freedom of action would leave none for the rest. This means that the material world if we’re all to live together in it, must have a fixed nature subject to Law.”

“Yes, I think I see that all right.”

“Now, let’s see the result of that. In a material world under law, you can’t have all the states of matter equally agreeable to our minds and bodies. Fire has a certain nature, which makes it comfortably warm for us here in this room. But that same nature would make it very uncomfortable for us if we went too near it, and would destroy our bodily tissues. In the same way, water can refresh, scald, freeze, or drown; the sun gives life — and death; earth provides food and buries its victims in a landslide. Food and medicine may become deadly if misused. Wood, iron, and explosives are capable of being employed to make weapons for man’s wars, or to serve his peaceful well-being. Again, the arrangement of matter can’t be equally favourable to everyone at every moment. A hill means easy walking for down-travellers; weary miles for those moving up. A river is a high-way to one man, an obstacle to another. In other words, a world of constant ‘natural laws’ is necessarily a world where well-being is variable and pain is possible — and, when the creatures dwelling in it have freedom of action of any kind, this means that there will be pain.”

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THE EFFECTS OF FREEDOM.

“Very well,” said Martin. “You’ve made your case, I think, so far. The creation of limited free beings who are to live in company with each other seems to involve the creation, also, of a fixed ‘field’ subject to law, in which they can operate, and from the inter-action of these two, pain arises. Right?”

“Right.”

“But I still feel you fail to account for the enormous extent of waste, suffering and misery in the world that we know in which both animals and innocent human beings are involved, as well as the guilty. How could a good God allow things to come to such a pass?”

He filled my glass again, and we both sipped meditatively for a time.

“Well,” I answered, “again I must warn you that when all that can be said has been said, the mystery will remain, though the burden of it may be lightened by clearer understanding.

“But to begin with, let’s see how far this mass of misery and suffering is connected with human free-will. A virtuous, perfectly social humanity dwelling under our conditions, would still, of course, be subject to the variations of the ‘field of matter’ in which we operate, and open, therefore, to the possibility of pain. But I think you will realise that, as things are, man, not nature, is man’s worst enemy.

“God made man free, and man, as a whole, fails to live up to the law of which all men are aware in some fashion or another. Yet men seek ‘the good’ — for in the moral field as in the material, evil is parasitic — it appears when some particular good is pursued at the cost of the larger good — the general code of right conduct. A man wants power, or pleasure, or security, or easy social relationships, or money — all good things — and he sweeps aside the moral obstacles which stand in his way. In the course of doing so, he also misuses the ‘field of nature’ and injures his fellow men. His misdeeds are like stones thrown in a pool, producing widening rings of evil before their effect is exhausted, both in his own life and in the lives of others. The world in which we live inherits the consequence of accumulated misconduct of this sort — as well as of righteous deeds and lives on the other side — and the innocent are, of course, involved in them. They inherit diseases, due to vice, bad traditions, perverted moral ideas; they are involved in poverty and social degradation, and in the disasters of war, with the famine, pestilence and insecurity that follow in its train. The evils are not their work, but they are the work ultimately of the free humanity to which they belong. God has placed men in a world which contains what is required for their essential well-being — if they are miserable, and injustice prevails, they have no right to shake their fists at Him.”

“I don’t follow you there. God made man’s free nature — if it hadn’t been for that there wouldn’t have been all this mess.”

“No — but what would there have been? A world of automata, following the laws of their being mechanically, lifted without any moral effort of their own from earthly to heavenly happiness. Do you think that a ‘virtue’ of this sort is worth comparing for an instant to that which is open to man as the result of God’s gift of freedom — a freedom which enables him to choose to serve his Divine Father, to pursue wisdom and justice, and offer his willing sacrifice to love? He couldn’t possibly do all this without the alternative being open, you know, and the struggle a real one. There might be palms and crowns, but there couldn’t be the victory.”

IS SUFFERING VALUABLE?

“That’s certainly true — but the price is jolly high, you know.”

“It seems to be high, because we’re on the spot where the fight is going on and the rest is out of sight. But there’s another aspect of suffering — especially the suffering of the good. I remember once a friend I had who said — as you did earlier this evening — that he couldn’t believe a good God would allow the innocent to suffer. A bit later on he said that ‘no one was really understanding or sympathetic who hadn’t suffered’. I expect you’ve known virtuous folks who had just that defect . . . They lived too smoothly. Healthful, useful, nice lives, reasonably prosperous and secure . . . but contrast them with the real saints, who’ve fought with beasts and devils and gone through sweat, blood and tears . . . Suffering makes real men and women.

“The true servants of God — even those out-side Christianity — have recognised that if you are to grow in perfection — that is, in the highest humanity — you must not only learn to endure suffering with fortitude, but you must “Embrace the Cross” as a positive good. I’m not going to pretend that the ordinary Christian gets within ‘cooee’ of this achievement — ‘grinning hard and bearing it’ is about as far as I can reach — and sometimes farther. But you’ve no right to leave out the judgments of these people, who have the highest experience of loving and suffering — or to reject their attitude as ‘neurotic perversion’. You might just as well reject the higher artistic perceptions of a great poet, or painter, or musician, or the intellectual perceptions of a philosopher, because you don’t happen to share them. It’s significant that it’s not those who serve God best, but those who serve Him only moderately or less than moderately, who make most protest about the ‘injustice’ of the sufferings of the innocent.

“But,” said Martin, “undeserved pain — and deserved pain for that matter — often lead men to lose all faith in God.”

“That is true,” I said. “It’s especially the case with those who’ve believed in God vaguely as a benevolent Being, and perhaps even carried out their formal Christian duties, but without ever grasping His reality and demands in a vital way. Suffering experienced — or the sight of horrors endured by others — is a challenge which shatters their illusions, and obliges them to make a real choice of accepting or refusing the Cross. In the same way, it brings the worldly or wicked man ‘up against’ the realities he has ignored or defied. He may accept the chance of amendment — or rebel finally, bitterly and with-out repentance. By the way, I think in many cases where you talk about ‘loss of Faith’ through suffering, what’s happened isn’t so much a positive loss at that point, but the shock of revelation of a shrine already empty . . . and that isn’t always a bad thing, ultimately. Knowing something of the truth about one’s self is a first step to Wisdom.”

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CHILDREN’S PAIN.

“Well, there are still three cases of human evil I want to raise — first, the suffering of children; secondly, the horror of madness and mental deficiency; and finally, the people whose social and moral environment make their perversion inevitable.”

“I must admit,” I said, “that if there’s one thing that haunts me, it’s stories of young children who are lost and perish in the bush, or who are starved to death or have dreadful things done to them by wild animals or evil men, or who suffer horrid disfigurement or pain from diseases. It all seems so morally meaningless. I can’t see, however, how you could have our ‘free-will’ world without the possibility of these crimes; and the misfortunes, again, are inevitable consequences of human nature and its limitation in a world which

is under the rule of natural law. Don't tell me that's not enough, because I know it isn't. All I can appeal to is the Christian belief that all innocent suffering has value in atonement for sin, in virtue of the same 'solidarity' which makes innocents liable to suffer because of the sins of others — for instance, the children of Germany today after the end of this terrible second 'Great War'. My Faith tells me that these little ones will have their tears dried and will gain added bliss, in eternity, from the knowledge that their guiltless suffering has been worthwhile from the standpoint of God's Plan. For the rest, I can only adore the mysteries of God's Providence.

DEFECTIVES AND MADMEN.

"Again, I can't suggest why God should let some human beings be born defective or freaks, any more than why others should die unborn or in infancy. In some cases, the defect may be the fruit of others' sins — in others, there's no evidence of that. However, there's this to be said: that the congenital defective can't fall into sin, because he has no mental freedom, while he can go to Paradise and is certainly destined for a happy eternity. As for lunatics, though they're not pleasant folk for sane people to see or associate with, they aren't usually unhappy — at least according to Jung. They are frequently 'artists who mistake their own creations for reality' — and who are far happier in the world of illusions than they would be other-wise. Where this is not so, the reason is in most cases due to personal fault in the sufferer's past life. Sometimes the state of insanity is due to a merciful 'invasion' from the subconscious where conscious life has become unbearable . . . "

"NEVER HAD A CHANCE."

"And so I come to your people who've 'never had a chance', who are 'born to a life of crime' or corrupted in early youth. It's a frightful evil, of course, that human beings should be in such degraded circumstances — but we should not imagine their condition worse than it is. I remember reading a passage in a book by the Anglican clergyman, Fr. Dolling, about the underworld of Portsmouth. He speaks of these vicious and criminal slum people as being comparatively innocent in a spiritual sense — there was little deliberate malice, because little moral consciousness about what 'decent people' call sin. The boys regarded stealing, the girls sexual promiscuity, as normal ways of supporting life. 'The Soul unquicken'd, the body alone is deprav'd, and therefore the highest part is still capable of the most beautiful development.' Another writer, Mr. Masterman, points out that folk of this sort have, however, a moral code of their own, in which loyalty, generosity, and mutual self-sacrificing, all play a prominent part . . . I can't help wondering whether Christ's words about harlots and publicans going into Heaven may not apply to their case, as compared to that of a lot of selfish, material-minded 'good citizens' who are regarded as highly respectable! It's worth remembering, anyway, that from my Christian standpoint the particular evil of sin is due to malice — and that no amount of irresponsible crime or immorality is to be compared with a wilful defiance of the known moral law of God."

THE PAIN OF ANIMALS.

At this point, Martha came in with a light supper, which we ate with relish, finishing up with coffee and liqueurs. I looked at the clock, but Martin (who was pouring some milk into a saucer for the cat) protested that I mustn't think of going yet.

"Feeding this sleek and petted animal," he said, "reminds me of one more objection to Providence you've not dealt with yet; the suffering of beasts. I mean, you can link up suffering with sin in the case of man; and, at worst, you can postulate compensation in a future life. But these creatures don't sin; they haven't any future life, according to you — and yet they suffer horribly from each other and from man today and, if what the paleontologists say is correct, 'nature red in tooth and claw' was going on for many ages before the first men came into existence. Where's the justice in that, John, my lad?"

"Well, Martin," I said, "you've brought up what a rather eminent Christian philosopher, E. I. Watkin, calls 'perhaps the greatest, because the most insoluble, difficulty against a Divine Providence'. You see, the trouble is that reason and revelation tell us something about man's suffering in relation to God's intentions, so that we can get some understanding about it; but when we come to the pain in the animal kingdom, we are completely in the dark, and all that we say is speculation."

WHY CRUELTY IS WRONG.

"Yes," he said, "I can see the difficulty there. But I suggest that it might clear the ground a bit if we got an idea of what 'animal pain' really involves. I mean, human pain contains so many other elements besides the actually physical experience from one moment to another, . . . and a lot of these elements aren't there, of course, with the animals."

“That’s true,” I answered, patting Bruce’s head as I did so. (The dog had come over beside me, and was on terms of dignified friendship with me by now.) “There’s no man who hates callousness or cruelty to animals more than I do. It has a bad effect upon the human beings who indulge in it — in a number of ways — by hardening their attitude to the pain of others generally, and by helping, in some cases, to minister to psychological perversions of a very sinister type indeed. For the rest, man has, I believe, been given full power over the animal world by God — but it’s a power which should be used intelligently, with a sense of responsibility towards the Creator; not with stupid recklessness and violence. You can ‘sin against Nature’ in this sense, in dealing not only with animals, but with the earth generally in a selfish and ruthless way, without regard to laws. Those who do so often suffer the consequences, as Americans and Australians are doing, in such evils as soil-erosion — which certainly can’t be held to be the ‘work of Providence’ any more than the results of this war that has just mercifully ended.

SENTIMENTAL FALLACIES.

“But, admitting all that about human cruelty and recklessness, I think if we want to talk sensibly about animal pain we’ve got to set aside a lot of false emotion about it, which arises from projecting our human consciousness into creatures which have nothing of the kind.”

“You mean,” said Martin, “the sort of statement like, ‘how would you like a great big giant to put you in a tiny little cage?’ — or ‘don’t you think old horses deserve consideration after years of unselfish service to man?’ ”

“That’s it,” I said. “Of course, this kind of thing has its uses in training children to habits of kindness — it has its place there, like legends and fairy-tales which convey a moral. But the trouble is that so many grown-ups, and really intelligent men — like Galsworthy, for instance — sob over wounded birds as if they were wounded flying children, and regard killing old horses as something like killing old-age pensioners. And to hear them on caged animals or birds in a zoo, you’d think the creatures suffered all the despair of innocent human prisoners in penal servitude for life.”

“And, of course,” said Martin, “a lot of them also disregard the distinction between the levels of animal consciousness; they seem to imagine that a crustacean suffers in the same fashion as a dog would, and ‘can’t bear the idea’ of boiling lobsters alive”

ANIMAL AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS.

“Yes,” I answered. “But even with the highest animals, the absence of human consciousness which gathers up impressions and sensations, puts them together and draws conclusions from them, means that they get let off all the worst things of human pain. . . .”

“For instance?” said Martin.

“Well, suppose I’ve had toothache all night, I haven’t just suffered the successive throb of pain from one instant to another. There’s the past experience of pain which remains with me, piling up; there’s the dread of the future, ‘won’t this ever stop?’ There’s the knowledge of the hateful necessity of going to the dentist and having it out with the ‘needle’ or having that ghastly drill . . . There’s the apprehension — ‘Good Lord, I hope it’s not pyorrhea . . . But an animal has none of this except the passing throb of pain from one instant to the next. It doesn’t recognise or suffer the whole process at all, and it certainly doesn’t reflect about it.

“Apply this, now, to the other matters we raised — the caged bird, the old horse, and the rest. The caged bird feels the moments of restriction when it tries its wings; it feels the momentary spasm of fear when the cat is near. But it doesn’t ‘long for the woodlands’ in the homesick fashion of an imprisoned child. It has none of the feelings and mental concepts which Mr. Galsworthy is suffering himself, and attributing to it. Again, an old horse may be physically incapable, and in physical pain — but he’s as incapable of feeling his master’s ingratitude as he was formerly of the ‘unselfish service’ attributed to him by his enthusiastic admirers. He hasn’t any ‘self’ in our sense, to be ‘selfish’ or ‘unselfish’ with.”

“So that a great deal of animal suffering is really human illusion?”

“Yes — we tend to deceive ourselves — inevitably, in view of the limitations of our thinking, and the peculiar character of our own experience. Even the descriptive words we utter about Nature convey to us a human meaning which fosters the illusion. Plants and animals ‘prey on one another’ — and we think of cruel human exploiters and killers; we speak of the ‘ruthlessness’ of the tropical forest; a tree killed by a parasite is a ‘victim’, and the process is a ‘tragedy’ . . . But all this is just bluffing ourselves with metaphors.”

THE WORK OF SATAN.

“I allow you all that,” said Martin, “but there remains the fact that animals do suffer, sometimes acutely, after their fashion, and, as I said, they apparently did so ages before men existed — so that the fall of man can’t have anything to do with it, as St. Paul seems to think when he spoke of all creatures groaning and travailing, in need of redemption. Anyhow, they can’t be ‘redeemed’ or paid for their pain, because they haven’t any souls.”

“Don’t be too sure,” I said, “about human sin and animal pain having nothing to do with each other. Have you ever read C. S. Lewis? He sets forth a rather striking theory that the hideous ferocity and waste and suffering which we see in nature — what we call ‘savagery’ and ‘ruthlessness’ in the struggles of the lower world — are an earlier phase of the same disaster which fell upon man in Eden. As you know, we Christians ascribe man’s fall to the operation of a mightier fallen being — the great created spirit, or angel, who became Satan, by using his own freedom to detach himself from the service of his Creator. Now, Lewis suggests that Satan — who is described by Our Lord as ‘The Prince of this World’ — really had some sort of ‘Guardian’ office connected with our own planet — an office which he used after his revolt to ‘poison the wells’, and pervert and thwart the harmonious development of its life. Hence the evolutionary growth by means of struggle, and at heavy cost, with which we are familiar. He suggests, too, that the ‘job’ originally given to man — on which he fell down — may have been to use his intelligence in the ‘uplifting’ of the animal world as God had ‘uplifted’ him by the gift of the supernatural life. Man still does the work in a partial, imperfect way when he ennobles certain types of animals, notably horses and dogs, in the course of adapting them to his service. Of course, all this is just speculation, but it seems to me to have the merit of giving a certain fundamental ethical significance to the whole cosmic process, as a battle between God and His adversary at different levels.”

“But,” said Martin, “aren’t you getting back to the dual-God idea that you refuted?”

“Not at all,” I answered. “Satan isn’t another God — he’s a creature existing in virtue of the Divine Power which upholds his being. And if you ask why he’s allowed to operate, I must again remind you of what I said about the highest good which God wants of His creatures; a good which involves victorious achievement, and therefore the possibility of future reward and disaster. Satan, having refused God, and damned himself, is used by God — against his will — in the service of the Divine Plan as the head of the opposing forces to be overcome.”

“So you believe that the struggle of evolution through the ‘survival of the fittest’ — with all the waste and pain involved — is a moral process?”

“Not when you look at it from the physical and material plane, which is all that concerns the natural scientist. But I suggest that behind that process the other struggle has been at work throughout, and that its full meaning emerges with the appearance of man, the link between material ‘nature’ and the world of free spirits. I’m afraid that’s all I can suggest about animal pain, such as it is. It remains a profound mystery, but I do insist that animals generally live in pleasure, rather than pain, on their own level — in spite of all the talk about ‘Nature red in tooth and claw’.”

THE MASS OF PAIN.

“Still, when all your ‘apologia’ is done, the mass of pain, human and animal, remains terrifyingly huge,” said my friend.

“I’m rather glad you said that, Martin,” I replied. “Because it gives me a chance to clear up a point which ought to be cleared up. We talk loosely about ‘the sum of pain’ as if it were a single great load. But here again, language conveys a false impression. I have pain A, you have pain B; Bruce, here, if you like, has pain C. But if you say that the total pain in the room is A plus B plus C, you are creating an imaginary composite; for no one is suffering that pain. When we have reached the limit of pain suffered by the highest being — something pretty awful, I grant you — we have all the ‘sum’ there can be. The addition of sufferers doesn’t add to the suffering.”

“Well,” said Martin, “you seem to have covered the ground very fairly from your viewpoint, and though, as you say, the mystery of evil still remains, one begins to perceive the indications of a solution ‘behind the horizon’.”

GOD ON THE CROSS.

“There’s one more thing I want to say,” I replied. “So far, though I’ve spoken through-out as a Christian, I’ve not used any argument which couldn’t be employed by a man who had never heard of Christ’s Divinity. But the ‘mystery of evil’ is immensely lightened when we see it in the light of another mystery whose contemplation has been the consolation of suffering men for some two thousand years. I said, a minute ago that no one bore the sum of the world’s pain; but I must correct that statement now. For we believe that God, Who created this world in which there is so much evil, devised a manner in which He Himself might endure the whole weight of its sorrows. In His Divine Nature, He could not suffer — since evil of all kinds is grounded in limitation, which makes the privation of good possible. But He assumed a Human Nature in the Person of the Son, the Word — entering, as Man, the creation marred by Satan’s malice in order that He might redeem it. In answer to the infidels’ challenge when he points to the miseries of mankind and rails, ‘Where is now your God?’ we can point, not to a remote throne of Power, but to the agonising, derelict victim of Calvary:

‘The iron of His world-ruling law was driven
‘By the strong doom of His world-ruling Will,
‘Through His own Body upon the eternal Cross
‘Of His Creative Sacrifice in Heaven;
‘And dark as death, on His death-conquering brow,
‘The whole world’s thorns were woven to make His Crown’.”

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST.

“I submit, then, that where the Deist, ‘without dogma’, breaks down, and the philosophic Theist falters in dismay, the man of Christian Faith can face the full truth of evil undismayed, and lift up his heart to the Saviour, the chief Victim and Victor in the fight against sin and pain. I won’t argue with you tonight about the Christian doctrines of original sin and the atonement — though we might have a session on that subject later. But you spoke of a solution “behind the horizon”. It is there, all-right — and we can see the glow of it against the clouds in our world of shadows and images. It is the Light of Christ.”

We both remained lost in thought for a while, and then I rose to go. “What about one for the road?” said Martin. He filled our two glasses a last time; we drank one another’s health, and so parted.
