

Doubts

by S.

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I SIT by my study window on a fair spring evening; before me lies smooth lawn and grass land, fringed and dotted with trees, the shadows of whose still leafless branches, cast by the sinking sun, stretch far across the bright green turf. Under the trees grow primroses, hyacinths, anemones, bluebells, and other flowers. Behind the house a garden; within it the carefully guarded promise of flower and fruit and vegetable. The silence is [Page 18] broken only by the sigh of a gentle breeze in the trees, and the songs of various birds.

"A refined and elevating surrounding," will be the verdict of those who are asked to consider it.

What is its cost? Its price is the blood of the innocent; the conditions of its maintenance, endless and ruthless war.

Let us inquire further. Within a hazel copse, at a small distance, is a burrow; in it dwells a colony of rabbits, perhaps half-a-dozen. They are creatures sensitive to pain, nervous, with ear and eye and nostril quick to give the alarm, with delicate tongue that distinguishes the poisonous herb, and permits it not to be eaten. Already the does are big with young, nay, already have young in many cases; before the autumn they will have brought into existence several "sixes" or "eights" of young ones. The oldest of these in turn will have bred; our small colony will have sent out many branches. There will not be less than eighty rabbits probably in my grounds. Their habit is to gnaw, nibble, and destroy leaf, stem, and flower; to burrow in the ground, and scratch it into little holes and heaps.

Overhead in the trees dwell numerous squirrels; they live on nuts and fruit and the young shoots of trees. In the spring they often gnaw the rind from the leading shoots, either to exercise their teeth on something soft, or for the sappy pulp: the tree is often deformed, sometimes killed.

The birds I have already mentioned; their habits are too well known to need description. With the artificial abundance of fruits and seeds produced by man, they also increase in numbers very rapidly.

Now you know the secret of smooth lawn, and delicate flower, of symmetrical tree, and promise of fruit; it is the continuous and systematic suppression and slaying of all these creatures. Our peaceful scene is brought about by the arbitrary displacement of one form of life, to replace it by another.

It is only by the "right" of being the most powerful and intelligent *animal* that man thus ousts every other living being that interferes with his plans.

Annexing the plain, the hill, the water, for his food supply, or for his pleasure ground, all living creatures that come in conflict with him for the possession of these are doomed.

The apparently innocent bread we eat is won by a war everlastingly waged by steel-jawed trap or gun, by poison, by exclusion from feeding grounds and slow starvation.

What then of many of us who begin to see

" one changeless Life in all the lives,
And in the Separate, one Inseparable." ?

[Page 20] What of our efforts at renunciation and abnegation of self for others, and how harmonise our lives with the given facts? Hard questions truly! Yet let us not scheme to evade answering them. He who sits here and meditates, who strives to be one

"Whose equal heart holds the same gentleness
For lovely and unlovely things",

so far as he is concerned in this "fair" scene for selfish gratification is a tyrant, a mere human butcher. To many of us our life begins to appear as a long record of oft-repeated habitual crime, the sin of being concrete self. Our every action seems tinged with blood, sometimes animal, sometimes human animal, but always blood.

Only by a consciousness of continual effort to strive towards the emancipation of all other entities from this concrete state, as well as oneself, does life seem justified. Only so far as our "refined and elevating surrounding" truly works for that end, and stimulates to effort, or gives opportunity to the completest manifestation of life here, *viz.*, man, to rise and free himself from all surrounding, can many of us feel its cost in blood justified. And we may then be able to say, "O, humble fellow beings whom we love, we offer you as an oblation, together with ourselves, for your kind and for ours; that being freed we may return and help you".

A miserable sophisticated argument perhaps, and one which is offered with misgivings. A long way round perhaps, a futile effort, because, maybe, wrongly made, and coming dangerously near to bloody sacrifice and all its attendant horrors.

We live now in such complicated surroundings, so far from that simple state which suffices for the highest of human life, that we are glad to try and utilize these conditions, fettered as we are. In endeavouring to do so, intelligence in us will often be marred by the lower desiring self, leading us into sophistries, and to false conclusions and illusive aspects of things. Yet, though we flounder on through almost endless

mazes, if we are honest with ourselves, these will at length be passed.

Who would not walk out and leave all behind him, and seek the Eternal Peace, unencumbered except by the bread and water and blanket of existence, if, at the very first step, he did not find himself held by innumerable ties of duty to kin, to employed, or employer ? Happy is he who can steer with steady hand and clear eye past all these rocks and eddies; who works ever in full conscious remembrance of the One, the Real, whose finite thought he is, both as mind and body, and yet with whom he knows himself to be identified — when the thing thought of, the thought, and the thinker, shall be combined in One.

Think not, you who read this, that it does not apply to you: you live under precisely similar conditions. Only the external husk is changed for you.