

CHAPTER V

NATURE AND MORALITY

At the beginning of this volume we called attention to the singular paradox that whereas, in the first age of Christianity the miracles of Jesus were regarded as glories of the faith, which the Church up to its powers sought to imitate, as charismata or graces of the Spirit, to-day they are regarded by many as among its chief difficulties. In the historical review there given I have sought to show how the change came about, by the gradual rise of the conception of the Reign of Law in nature, which has to-day developed into the further idea that physical nature is a completely self-enclosed system of physical causes and effects.

The practical adoption of this idea from contemporary science by much current idealism and also current Modernist theology has led many to identify the "laws of Nature" with the laws of God, and under the influence of this confusion to confine the sphere of petitionary prayer to purely spiritual matters, and to rule out the whole conception of "miracle" as obsolete, inasmuch as it was supposed to imply an interference by God with His own laws. In the last chapter we have seen how partial and belated this concept of Nature has become, and how necessary it has also

become for Modernist thinkers to reconsider their over-hasty concession to the supposed necessities of science.

But there is still another cause of the extraordinary revolution of which I have spoken. Modernist religious thought, under the influence of science and philosophical idealism, has moved away from the fundamental Biblical idea of the deep and vital connection between man's sins and the outward evils of this life, the tragic element in human experience, famine, disease, and premature death.

The contrast between the prevailing thought of our day and that of the Old Testament and the first Christian age is that whereas the modern mind is perfectly willing to admit and enforce the connection between ignorance and death, it is wholly scornful of there being any relation whatever between sin and death. Hence that which gave their chief meaning and glory to the "signs" of Jesus and to His Resurrection has been wellnigh lost by the men of to-day. Their very defenders have forgotten to defend them on this ground, and regard them merely as signs of Divine power, and the last thing the apologists of to-day think of is precisely the thing which made them so attractive to the apologists of the first age. To these they were the supreme signs that the tragic powers of both sin and death were broken, and the true idea of the Divine Creator was at last being visibly realised, and would be completed even in this suffering, sorrowing, and dying world of men. To them the miracles of Jesus were "signs" of the coming of

heaven to earth, anticipation of the triumph of spirit, as the charm of the first spring flowers is that they are the heralds of all the glories of coming summer.

From these two causes, the rise of the idea of a rigid natural order and the weakening of the idea of a moral order in the world of nature, it has come about that what to the first Christian age were manifestations, are to us interruptions of the Divine Order. We have transferred our conception of the Divine Order from the moral to the physical region.

We have now, therefore, fairly to face the question whether this fundamental idea of the Bible that sin leads inevitably not only to moral and spiritual decay but to outward tragedy and physical calamity of all kinds, is obsolete, or whether it is and must ever be a living and formidable part of the Christian interpretation of life. Is it, or is it not, true that "sin" leads to "death"?

The question to-day is closed for many because they think it is inseparably associated with the story of Eden—the coming of death into the human world and Adam's sin. The real question has little or nothing to do with the myth. Every real student of the Bible knows that the principle that sin always works on toward death and woe goes through it all from beginning to end. The myth, as Dr Denney has said, was created by the faith, not the faith by the myth. The faith as distinct from the myth grew out of the Hebrew idea of God as an ethical being, and is, as I hope to show, still inseparable from any fully thought-out Theism.

Why is the faith for the moment in an eclipse which throws several of the vital ideas of Christianity as it were, out of focus, depriving them of half their meaning and power? I do not know any one who has put the matter so incisively as Dr Denney.

“Probably the most widespread idea,” he writes, “about the relation of the natural to the spiritual world is that which simply contrasts them. They are realities which stand apart, which do not interpenetrate, which are simply neutral to each other. At the utmost, nature is that stage on which the moral life is transacted. But it is quite indifferent to the quality of that life. The laws of nature are the same for the good man as for the bad: the flood drowns them both, and the lightning does not go out of the way of either. It is even argued that this moral neutrality of nature is necessary to protect the integrity of the moral-life. If nature immediately sided with virtue and opposed vice, if she did justice on her stage at every turn, disinterested goodness would be impossible: men would never be able to prove that they loved goodness for its own sake. Without disputing the amount of truth that there is in this view, it is apparent that it is not adequate to the depth and subtlety of the facts. Nature is not merely the stage of the moral life, but in some sense its soil. The moral life is not merely transacted in the face of nature: it is rooted in it, and grows up in profound and vital relations to it. The nature which is absolutely severed from the spiritual life—which does nothing but confront it in serene

or scornful impartiality—is not the real nature in which we live and move and have our being. It is one of the abstractions which physical science constructs for its own convenience, but which are apt to mislead rather than enlighten in philosophy or theology. The only real nature is that to which we and our spiritual experiences are vitally related, and our problem is not to acquiesce in the idea of the ethical neutrality of nature . . . but to see in it, in the last result, the manifestation, the organ, the ally of God. The universe is a system of things in which good can be planted, and in which it can bear fruit; it is also a system of things in which there is a ceaseless and unrelenting reaction against evil. This view of nature is vital both to the doctrine of sin and to that of reconciliation.”¹ I would add to this last sentence that it is vital also to faith in the Divine Providence, and in the power of prayer to influence natural events, as also to the understanding of the “miracles” of the New Testament in particular, and, above all, those of our Lord.

In the above passage Dr Denney points out that the thinking of the modern mind with which he is dealing has its origin in the scientific method of dealing abstractly with all its problems. It views each field in which for the moment it is working, *e.g.*, physics, chemistry, and biology, in abstraction from other areas—*i.e.*, as if it were a separate and complete field of knowledge. It assumes, as a working postulate, the independence of its own field. As a matter of fact, all the areas

¹ *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pp. 201, 202.

are interconnected in the great web of nature, and interact with each other. But the investigator gets to work as if it were not so. Now what is perfectly admissible as a working method leads to the gravest errors, if we forget the "let it be granted" with which we started and exalt the postulate into a dogma. This is precisely what has happened with the inclusive abstraction of "Nature," which science has framed to describe the total world of sense phenomena. Nature in this sense is in fact only a part of a much larger whole, the total world of the Universe, with which it is in interrelation and interaction. It is in this abstraction and in its evolution into a dogma that we find the roots of that fallacy of the "closed system" idea of nature, and of nature's moral neutrality which has caused such mischievous and widespread confusion in the period of thought from which we are now emerging. What confusion and distress it has caused since the days of Mill's famous outburst on the crimes of "Nature" let one or two often-quoted passages bear witness. In the most remarkable of all his essays, the Romanes Lecture of 1893, Huxley, to the dismay of his fellow-evolutionists, impeached the Cosmic process in language almost as vehement as that of Mill. "The Cosmic process" (*i.e.*, "Nature") encourages "ruthless self-assertion," the "thrusting aside of all competitors," and teaches the "gladiatorial theory of existence. It has no sort of relation to moral ends." "The imitation of it by man is inconsistent with the first principles of ethics." The conclusion is inevitable: "Let us understand, once for all, that the ethical

progress of Society depends not on imitating the Cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it." A decade or two later Mr Bertrand Russell, in one of his chameleon phases of philosophic outlook, gives equally passionate expression to his sense of man's pitiful case in the presence of an almighty and indifferent Nature. He is impressed by the appalling contrast between man's moral ideals of justice, mercy, and truth, and the brutal world of reality in which man finds himself imprisoned. He is perfectly certain that there is nothing to be said for a God over both. In such dismaying conditions what can a free man do to keep his soul alive? How in such an alien and inhuman world can so powerless a creature as man preserve his aspirations untarnished? "A strange mystery it is that Nature, omnipotent but blind, in the revolutions of her secular hurryings through the abysses of space, has brought forth at last a child, subject still to her power, but gifted with sight, with knowledge of good and evil, with the capacity of judging all the works of his unthinking Mother. In spite of Death, the mark and seal of the parental control, Man is yet free during his brief years to examine, to criticise, to know, and in imagination—to execute. To him alone in the world with which he is acquainted, this belongs; and in this lies his superiority to the resistless forces that control his natural life." A fierce passage follows in which Mr Russell condemns mere acquiescence in and flattery of the ways of Nature. "The religion of Moloch—as such creeds may be generically called—is in essence

the cringing submission of the slave who does not love in his heart. Since the independence of ideals is not yet acknowledged, Power may be freely worshipped, and receive an unlimited respect despite its wanton infliction of pain. When we have realised that Power is largely bad, that man, with his knowledge of good and evil, is but a helpless atom in a world which has no such knowledge, the choice is again presented to us. Shall we worship Force or shall we worship Goodness? Shall our God resist the evil or shall He be recognised as the creation of our own goodness?"¹

In citing these indictments of Mill, Huxley, and Russell, we have certainly travelled a long way from Wordsworth.

Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege
 Through all the years of this our life to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments nor the sneers of selfish men
 Nor greetings, where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the noon
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk,
 And let the misty mountain winds be free
 To blow against thee.

¹ Phil. Essays, *A Free Man's Worship*, pp. 66-68, ed. 1910.

There is something more here than mere contrast, there is downright contradiction. We are filled with sheer bewilderment. How can ordinary intelligent men, and still more, how can men of uncommon mental distinction take such glaringly opposite views of Nature? It is hardly too much to say that while to the poet Nature, in her relations with men, is a Divinity, to the men of science quoted she is, except that they look on her as unconscious, a kind of devil. We can only really account for so singular a contradiction when we realise that they mean different things by the same term, Nature. In Wordsworth we have the religious view of Nature, which is synoptic in character, Nature as part of a great whole in which God is working out supreme ethical and spiritual ends. The assurance as to this enables him, unlike these others, to feel that he is not living in an alien but in a friendly world, and in the beauty of Nature to find a sacrament and a benediction.

The Nature which the others are thinking of is a Nature which for purposes of scientific investigation has been severed from its context in the whole, severed on one side from God and on the other from man, and assumed to be uninfluenced by, and unconscious of, either. In other words, we have an "idol" of the study and the laboratory, created by a logical blunder, substituted for the Nature that we used to know. The perplexity and trouble caused by this to men, who have to a large extent retained the Christian moral values, is sufficiently obvious to all sympathetic readers of these three remarkable essays.

We have in the past century had all kinds of attempted reconstructions of belief based on the attempt to combine what was felt to be most precious in the moral and spiritual inheritance of the past with this supposed intellectual necessity, that Nature should be regarded as a closed physical system, closed, in effect, from both God and man, indifferent to moral and spiritual distinctions, bent only on maintaining the uniformity of her own working. The idea, as we have seen, had an almost hypnotic influence on the great Victorians. They were not always in the same mind as the essayists of whom I have spoken. Sometimes they made the best of it, and found something glorious in the serene neutrality of Nature, and desired it for themselves rather than the feverish action and passions of men.

From the intense clear star-sown vault of heaven,
 Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
 In the rustling night air came the answer,
 Wouldst thou be as these are, live as they !

And with joy the stars perform their shining,
 And the sea its long moon-silvered roll,
 For, self-poised they live nor pine with noting
 All the fever of some differing soul.

Bounded by themselves and unregardful
 In what state God's other works may be,
 In their own tasks all their powers outpouring,
 These attain the mighty life you see.

So sang Matthew Arnold. How he reconciled it with his faith that over the neutrality of Nature was "a Power not ourselves that makes for right-

eousness," I do not know that he ever explained. But there were various other attempts at synthesis. I think that probably most Victorian Modernists who gave serious and educated thought to the problem so poignantly put by Huxley in the Romanes Lecture, and who saw the impossibility of his view that mere "Nature" could produce a being higher than herself, and accepted therefore some Theistic or at least idealistic view of the Universe, effected their synthesis in some such way as this.

"Nature," in effect they said, "is a self-enclosed, neutral system. It is God's instrument for creating and disciplining souls. It may have other purposes, but this is the one that most clearly reveals its Creator's purpose, for His nature is most plainly manifest in man's ideals. But in order to be His instrument or tool, Nature must be herself. Just as a weapon or tool of man must first be itself, if it is to be of any use to him, must have its constant weight, shape, and edge, so Nature must have her own determinate constant properties and laws of operation. To observe these is her one concern, as God's servant. He will do the rest in the making of souls." Here we have a really serious attempt at synthesis, though I doubt if the last sentence is any longer relevant, since science has thrown the network of the causal judgment beyond what used to be called Nature, into the psychological and sociological realm, and refuses to recognise that there is any region into which she cannot come and completely explain. If the purely scientific view be a complete and final view, there seems to be nothing left for God to do, and the scientific

account must completely displace the religious interpretation.

But independently of this, is this synthesis of God, a closed and morally neutral system of Nature and man, really a complete and satisfactory account of the processes of Nature and history ?

First of all, it is obviously Deistic in its form. We seem back in the position which Carlyle satirised, "An absentee God sitting outside His world, watching it go !"

There is surely something defective, something savouring fatally of the mechanistic idea of nature, in the middle term of the three—which we have borrowed from the laboratory of science, to fit into a triad of which the other two members are derived from other regions, religious faith and personal intuition. Has not God put something of Himself into Nature, then, and still more into man, other than science can give any account of ? If so, Nature is more than a tool, and man more than an external product.

But without departing from the closed system idea of Nature, we may, perhaps, get a better simile to describe her than a tool. Nature is like a great factory, which for its smooth and efficient running needs to have its hard and fast laws for all its operatives, even though they be members of the owner's own family. And we may even think of it as a factory designed not only to turn out carpets or hardware, but to train manufacturers on a smaller scale ! But the more we humanise the illustration, the more, that is to say, we get down to realities, the more we shall be in danger of departing from

the closed system idea altogether. It becomes impossible to think of such a factory system as being ever in absolute moral neutrality to the conduct of the family under training. The illustration, as we try to bring it more into agreement with plain facts, breaks down in our hands.

But it is time now to raise the question that has been lurking in the background all along. Is it really true to the facts to say that the great system of Nature, as we know it, is absolutely indifferent to the moral character and conduct of the men and women who live within it? Is it true, as Huxley and Russell, in their passionate revolt against the tyranny of the Nature in which they believe, seem sometimes to say, that Nature is actually hostile to man's highest ideals? If the picture which these draw of the "cosmic order" and "Nature" be literally true, then the whole religious interpretation of Nature must, of course, go by the board, as well as all idealistic thought and morality. But is either picture true, the picture which makes Nature neutral to human right or wrong, or the picture which makes her hostile to right?

It will be enough for our purpose if we can show that the picture of her neutrality is radically distorted, and to this we shall at present confine our argument. Current idealism intimidated, I think, by the closed-system idea of Nature, is curiously vague here. It seems simply to take over the current scientific idea and include it without question in its synthesis. We may turn again for information to Professor Whitehead's review of nineteenth-century thought.

"This idealistic school . . . has swallowed the scientific scheme in its entirety as being the only rendering of the facts of Nature, and has thus explained it as being an idea in the ultimate mentality. In the case of absolute idealism, the world of nature is just one of the ideas, somehow differentiating the unity of the Absolute: in the case of pluralistic Idealism involving monadic mentalities, this world is the greatest common measure of the various ideas which differentiate the various mental unities of the various monads. But, however you take it, these idealistic schools have conspicuously failed to connect, in any organic fashion, the fact of Nature with their idealistic philosophies."³

In most, at least, of the versions of it familiar to me, modern idealism would come a long way short of accepting Dr Denney's sweeping statement, "The Universe is a system of things in which there is a ceaseless and unrelenting reaction against evil," as it would certainly regard the whole Biblical idea of sin leading to "death," and righteousness to "life," as an obsolete idea.

The general idea of Nature held by current idealism seems rather to be that of a resisting medium in conflict with which the human reason—speculative and practical—is kindled into a glow of intellectual and moral insight, hard experience awaking its *a priori* powers, even as the resistance of the marble awakens the slumbering genius of the sculptor. In this way the idea of Nature

³ *Science and the Modern World*, p. 93.

as absolutely neutral is preserved, and all the stress of evolution thrown on man's reason. But the marble itself does not differentiate between the sculptor's true and false intuitions of beauty. It is passive, inert, neutral. It does not strike back at him when he goes wrong, nor reward him of itself when he goes right! But it compels him to struggle with it as Jacob struggled with the angel, and the struggle somehow develops, and awakens the man's personality and conscience, his latent powers of discovering good and evil.

This is true and profound up to a certain point. But I do not think it implies, as the Bible does, that sin always brings suffering of one kind or other, either to the sinner himself or others, or that the world is such that it reacts against men and nations who identify themselves with evil, and favours men and nations who identify themselves with good.

Now there is certainly much in man's moral nature that is utterly incapable of being derived from experience of the happy consequences of virtuous living and the tragedies that result from moral failure. The story of man's moral as of his intellectual progress is not so much the story of the making as of the awakening of personalities to the eternal environment that lies behind the natural.

But we buy our conservation of the idea that Nature is a complete and self-enclosed physical system much too dear, at the expense of the sacrifice of too many of the plain facts of the history of man's moral development, if that purchase compels us to hold to the view that Nature is morally neutral towards human right and wrong, and concerned

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simply with maintaining her own uniform and orderly physical working.

At first sight, it is true, the facts appear to bear out this view so irresistibly that there seems no need to suppose that we need attribute it to any such far-fetched cause as the laboratory concept of the closed system of Nature. Does not simple observation of everyday life compel the view of the inhuman neutrality of Nature to man's good and evil deeds, and contradict the crude old idea that sin leads to death ?—

Yet even when man forsakes
All sin,—is just, is pure,
Abandons all which makes
His welfare insecure,—
Other existences there are that clash with ours.

Streams will not curb their pride
The just man not to entomb,
Nor lightnings go aside
To give his virtues room :
Nor is that wind less rough
That blows a good man's barge.

Nature with equal mind
Sees all her sons at play ;
Sees man control the wind,
The wind sweep man away ;
Allows the proudly riding and the foundering bark.*

Yet, somehow, the same writer constantly asserted, as has been said above, there is " a Power not ourselves that makes for rightcousness." We may fairly ask, " What does He *do* ? "

* M. Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*

All that the poet has said may be true and yet Nature may be anything but neutral in man's struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood. It is perfectly true that our individual goodness or badness makes only occasionally any difference to our personal expectation of life. No insurance company makes any such inquiry into the virtues of its clients as it does into their physical constitution. It sounds their lungs and their hearts, and inquires if they are of a sedentary occupation or expect to be travelling in tropical regions. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. It does inquire if they are temperate, and it looks carefully for any trace of venereal poisoning. But it makes no inquiry as to truth, humility, courage, or justice.

Such considerations are supposed to close the whole question as to the moral neutrality of Nature to man's good or evil, and to make obsolete the whole Biblical idea of the relation between sin and death, righteousness and life. But we must, surely, go deeper. If we do so we shall discover a great assumption which conceals a fatal fallacy. All our popular current ways of looking at the matter take for granted the existence of a stable and ordered civil society, and the average lease of life that we have under such a condition. We never think of anything else, or provide for any other condition. The schedules of insurance companies, in Western lands at least, do not lay their account with possible cataclysms of the heaven or earth, earthquakes, typhoons, and sweeping pestilences. These are supposed to be beyond

normal probability. Yet if such shattering calamities happened which broke up the stable order of society, and resolved it into "a huddle of unrelated units," individuals striving desperately for dear life by the strength of their hands and the cunning of their brains, what would the expectation of life be then? We make a similar assumption about great moral apostasies, and this assumption conceals the basal realities, however convenient it may be in practice.

But instead of such paralysing calamities falling on society from without, suppose that by a sudden unseen apostasy the virtues were blotted out from men's hearts and nothing left but the animal instincts of self-assertion, hunger, and lust, society would be suddenly dissolved from within. The normal expectation of life would vanish, and the reign of death be swift and appalling. The world would reek with mortality as certainly as it does when there is an earthquake. The triumph of sin would mean the triumph of death. In such a case would it be any longer possible to maintain the ethical neutrality of Nature? At every turn she would be bringing home to our horrified senses the close and vital relation between the world within, the world of moral evil and good, and the world without, the world of suffering and death. That relation is under normal circumstances concealed from us because we take for granted a certain average of virtue and self-command in civilised society. We have had an appalling reminder of how thin is the conventional crust of "normal expectations" in the Great War. I do not know

how the life insurance companies met it! But I am certain that it shattered all their ordinary tables. It was the most colossal illustration in civilised history of sin working death.

Why then should we talk of the moral neutrality of Nature, or of Nature's being a closed system in which every physical event can be completely explained in terms of its purely physical antecedents, irrespective of our exertions or volitions? Could the physical death resulting from such a hypothetical moral apostasy as I have imagined be explained in terms of purely physical antecedents? Such very obvious considerations inevitably lead us to feel that both the current popular science and the ordinary version of idealism have somehow got out of touch with the realities of human experience and history. Nature must be less neutral in man's education than they imagine.

That type of idealism here, which, to use Dr Denney's phrase, regards Nature as simply the stage on which the moral life was transacted, has therefore at this point laid itself fatally open to the criticism of the naturalistic evolutionary school. These writers, following in the wake of Darwin, have denied the necessity of presupposing any *a priori* element in morality. Morality is fundamentally a racial character which men have developed in the struggle for existence. It is the product of natural selection as much as the beak and claw of the bird of prey. The peoples who have developed an adequate social structure and a moral character adequate to the sustaining of that social structure survive, because they are the strongest and fittest to survive.

The others do not, because having no adequate morality, they cannot maintain a vigorous social life. Moral duties are thus resolved into racial expediences. They have been driven home to man's mind by the tremendous discipline of events, the remorseless penalties which Nature has enforced on the peoples who refused to obey them, and the rewards which she has bestowed on those who practise them. These penalties falling upon anarchic, apathetic, and decadent peoples, and through them striking at the individuals of which they are composed, are of many kinds—privation, pestilence, famine, and enslavement. But all penalties are privations of life, and behind them is the supreme penalty of death. Such in substance is the naturalistic evolutionary theory of morality.

Its real value lies not in the naturalistic philosophy with which it has been associated, which is already passing into the twilight, but in the fresh contact with the facts, and in particular the new and closer study of the influence of the environment, the development of Anthropology, Sociology, and Comparative Ethics, which the rise of the evolutionary theory has brought about. I do not think that it is possible reasonably to deny that Natural Selection has played a great part in the development of human society and morality.

Least of all do I see why religious thought should find any difficulty in granting and welcoming this view, for it represents in a most drastic and unexpected way a return to the Biblical idea that sin works death, and that God educates the human race by the consequences of its own actions. The

testimony to the truth of this ancient principle is all the more impressive as nothing was further from the thoughts of those who first advanced and who have laboured at the demonstration of the evolutionary theory. They got their theory from a fresh and a more thorough study of the facts of Nature, primitive and savage man; and history.

When we come to ask the further question of whether the theory of Natural Selection taken alone can account for all the facts of the moral life, I think we must say that it fails conspicuously to do so. It has been present as a mighty and persistent factor in the development, but, when all is said, an external factor only. It has not created the moral consciousness of man. It has awakened, developed, and conserved it. On all this part of the debate the idealistic answer seems to me sufficient and conclusive. We cannot get out of Natural Selection and the evolutionary process above either the full moral imperative or the intrinsic values which are revealed in conscience. The evolutionary account of morality can explain only the protective husk under which the moral reason of man, which tells him the difference between right and wrong, grows up to maturity.

Dr Rashdall has put the distinction with humour as well as truth.

"Evolution," he says, "does not produce our geometrical ideas; they are only producible in a mind already potentially endowed with a capacity for apprehending them. And so with moral ideas. It would be as absurd to talk about 'the struggle for existence' and 'natural selection' as con-

stituting by themselves the 'origin' of our moral ideas, as it would be to treat the case of the schoolmaster as being the 'origin' of our geometrical ideas, though there may be persons in whom these ideas would never have been developed without that agency. Moralities could have developed only in beings endowed with a capacity for Moral Reason; and the truths of which our Moral Reason assures us are not less true because we recognise that certain biological facts and processes have been the condition of their discovery by this or that individual in this or that generation. Moral ideas are no more 'produced' or generated by physical events than any other of the categories of human thought. When this is recognised, there should be no hesitation in admitting that all the biological and psychological and social facts insisted on by the evolutionary moralists have really been conditions of moral development. They really do help to explain why such a virtue was developed at such a time and place, and another virtue in different circumstances, why this aspect of morality was emphasised in one kind of community and another in another, and so forth."*

With this admission I entirely agree. There is no reason whatever why the most convinced Idealist should not only "admit," but should most cordially welcome the great service which the evolutionary moralists have done by bringing us into fresh contact with the facts of human life and history by calling attention to the great part which natural selection has played in awakening the

* *Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. ii. pp. 99-100.

human spirit to the perception of the moral order of the Universe, as well as in developing the human mind in the knowledge of eternal truth.

But if this be so, the whole popular theory of the moral neutrality of nature must go by the board, and disappear submerged by the overwhelming advance of knowledge. To say that Natural Selection, broadly regarded, selects the more highly advanced types of society, and, broadly regarded, destroys the decadent and morally torpid peoples, to establish this as a general law, in spite of apparent exceptions, is to take a long step towards recognising not only that "Nature" is anything but "morally neutral," but that the world is under moral government, and that God educates men in truth and goodness not only through other men, but by the consequences of their own actions, in other words, by the rewards and retaliations of the natural environment.

Have the greatest intuitive and imaginative writers ever held anything else? Have they ever succumbed to the dreary fallacy that nature was wholly neutral in the great drama of the human spirit?

Æschylus, Dante, Shakespeare—have they not all made us feel that the nature of things is remorselessly on the side of justice, mercy, and truth? That sin within works death and woe without, that there is a close inner relation between them, is part of the very substance of their thought, and has inspired the deepest notes of their music. All this is really unthinkable on the supposition of an absolutely neutral nature. Nature is far too

closely inwoven with the psychical life of man to admit of anything of the kind. The system of Nature and human life is to the synthetic genius of the poets one and not two dissevered though parallel parts, and they, like all the great Biblical writers, believe that the wages of sin is death. I do not say that the great humanists teach this in any narrow way in their tragedies. They recognise the sufferings of the innocent, and the apparent inequalities of justice in the mysterious whole of the world. But the undertone is more or less, I think, the same in all the greatest.

I do not claim, and for our immediate purpose it is not necessary to claim, that the evolutionary idealistic interpretation of man's ethical training is identical with the Biblical interpretation. It would be, indeed, surprising if it were. The evolutionists and the Biblical writers approach the facts of life from quite distinct points of view, and use different methods. The religious interpretation of life, of which we have the classical form in the Old and New Testaments, comes down, as it were, upon the world from the idea of God. It has reached the faith in His ethical nature and in His sovereign control of all things. It therefore seeks to explain the facts of life in terms of this growing faith. In the Old Testament and in the New we have a great labour of thought expended on this study of human life *sub specie aeternitatis*. We see this interpretation growing out of its first crude form by honest facing of all the facts, and passing out at last into its fully developed form in the New Testament. It is what William James called

"the personal and romantic view of life," which recognises personality, individuality, the living relation of God with living human beings in mercy and in judgment and in Fatherly care. The modern scientific view begins with human beings, and proceeds like every science by way of the inductive methods. It makes abstraction from all particulars, and, dwelling on all common characteristics, it reaches out after general laws.

It is surely perfectly clear that the last thing we ought to expect is complete coincidence between the two accounts. To do so would be as absurd as to expect identity of detail in pictures of a mountain range taken from two totally different points of view. Yet, for all that, both may be absolutely true pictures. All that we have a right to look for is such general agreement as will enable us to see that the object pictured is the same.

Now I do not see how we can possibly maintain that the view of the "cosmic process" given us by Huxley, in which "Nature" is represented as fighting against man's higher life, can be brought into any harmony with the religious interpretation. It is radically inconsistent with the Divine Providence. Further, I do not see how the view which regards Nature as neutral to man's higher life can be brought into harmony with the Biblical view in its full Christian form. It is also radically inconsistent with the Christian ideas of providence and prayer. The inevitable result of trying to combine views so divergent must be to mutilate either the religious or the scientific interpretations or both.

But on the view which I have endeavoured to set forth in this chapter, there seems to me to be no such contradiction, but rather a deep and surprising agreement.

For on both views alike, Nature is anything but neutral, it takes sides definitely with those peoples who stake their lives on essential morality. Both views, also, alike recognise that the penalties of wrongdoing and false thinking and intellectual sloth are not necessarily inflicted on the wrongdoer or false thinker himself, but often, though not always, on the community to which he belongs. It matters not that the scientific view ascribes this to the organic character of society, or to "solidarity," and the religious view speaks of vicarious suffering, for in principle the two ideas are the same.

I believe, therefore, that that appalling contradiction which Mill, Huxley, and Russell found to exist between the alien cosmic order which they discerned with their senses and understanding, and the world of moral values of which they were inwardly aware, has just as little existence as that supposed neutrality and self-sufficiency of Nature which more idealistic thought teaches; and that, on the contrary, we have, with all remaining difficulties, good reason to believe, as Christian thought has always believed, that Nature is dependent upon God, is purposive throughout towards His spiritual ends, and that it is plastic in His hands for the guidance and discipline of free human spirits. I admit that what we have is faith rather than demonstration, that there are unsolved problems in the disharmonies of Nature and the

tragedies of human life, and that our knowledge of the stupendous whole is exceedingly limited. Yet we know enough to be morally certain that we hold the clue to the labyrinth in the ideal ends of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, in the knowledge and pursuit of which and of Him in whom they are One "standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom," and that great Nature, far from being hostile or neutral to these ideal ends, is in the long run decisively on their side.

Let us now draw together the threads of our argument, and consider the bearing of its results on the question of our Lord's miracles.

If that argument has been sound, the positive evils which man endures from the great system of Nature are contingent either upon his departure from true and worthy ways of thinking and living, or his failure to attain them. They are all in their Divine intention revelatory of the true order, and therefore educative. And inasmuch as God wills this perfection for all His children, they are contingent upon a condition of man's heart and mind which is not in conformity with God's purpose for him. They are not parts of the Divine and eternal order at all. They are, on any thoroughgoing Theistic view of the world, signs that man has not as yet attained that depth and width of knowledge, and sufficient purity and loyalty of heart as son of God and brother of men in the great human family or Kingdom of God, which he is meant to attain. All this seems to me to follow quite naturally and inevitably from the faith that "the world is not a vale of tears, but

a place of soul-making." That again follows inevitably from the Fatherhood of God as revealed by Jesus Christ. But if this fundamental view of the spiritual ground, nature, and purpose of the world be true, and if the natural evils of life are signs that man has not yet attained full spiritual maturity, then it would seem to follow, that if Jesus of Nazareth were the true Son of God, the ideal human being whom they depict Him to have been, it was fitting that He should do just the kind of works that they declare Him to have done, and show Himself uniquely master of those natural evils.

And on the other hand, if He did what He is reported to have done, He has definitely verified that general view of the world as created by God, as directed by His will towards the realisation of His Kingdom, and as meantime plastic in His Hands for the everyday protection and discipline of His children, in which Jesus Himself demonstrably lived and moved and had His being.