

# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LORDSHIP IN CREATION.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL, SYDNEY,

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25th, 1885,

On behalf of the Animals Protection Society,

BY

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PSALM viii, 6—9. "Thou madest man to have dominion of the works of Thy hands, and Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is Thy name in all the world!"

MAN'S Lordship in Creation—it is a delegation (says the Psalmist) of the authority of the "Lord our Governor." It is, therefore, to be exercised with at least some shadow of likeness to the law and spirit of the Divine Government. This truth, constantly applied to man's rule over his fellow-men, is here extended to that dominion of mankind over the animal world, which is described in the first chapter of Genesis, the charter of God's original creation, as derived from the "Image of God" in man. Lordship rightly wielded implies beneficence, protection, love, even to self-sacrifice, for those whom the great King of Kings has put into our hand. Therefore, when the Divine royalty was manifested on earth in the Son of God, incarnate in true humanity, it was in the perfection of these qualities that it showed forth His glory: and the Lord of all made Himself the servant of all, that He might save and bless all in the Name of His Father's love. Therefore, by an instructive use of language—which often, I fear, sounds like an ironical rebuke of our actual



practice—we call the spirit of beneficence to the weak and suffering the spirit of “humanity.” We recognise in it what man ought to be, just in proportion as his superiority in strength and resources invests him with some portion of the Divine Majesty.

(I.) As we study the great kingdom of organic life, to which we ourselves belong in common with the brute creation, we see it sustained by the balance of two great laws. There is the instinct of self-preservation, self-interest, self-love, manifested in strange and terrible reality in “the struggle for existence,” which modern observation and science disclose to us with increasing clearness, and out of which each order of creation emerges, fit to do exactly what the Creator of all has designed that it shall do. It has its place in the development of humanity; all human laws and institutions reckon upon it as an unceasing and unfailing influence in the affairs of men. There are forms of political science, which, even exaggerate it into the sole or dominant force of the world; in its right measure it is forced upon all by the very order of God’s Providence. But there is always, in conflict with this, the higher law of self-sacrifice in love, of the strong for the weak, of the ruling power for the sake of those it rules. It is an equally instinctive part of all created being. We have rudimentary exemplifications of it in the lower animal creation; as in that tenderness and self-sacrifice of maternal love, which our Lord Himself did not disdain to make a type of his protecting care over His people; and, where animals have been domesticated, and so have felt and reflected the influence of human character, in their loyal and unselfish devotion, even to death, for the sake of the master whom they trust and adore. But it is, as I have already said, properly called the law of humanity. In man it is, or should be, the ruling influence, controlling and limiting the law of self-interest, which yet, for the sake of self-preservation, it may not destroy; and unquestionably, whatever cold or cynical philosophies of human nature may fancy, it is one chief enthusiasm of human life, always powerful as a deep under-current beneath the superficial stream of selfishness, and constantly breaking out in an impulsive force, which sweeps all counter influences away. We reckon on it, as a matter of course, for our homes, in the self-sacrifice of parents for their children, and in less degree, of children for their parents, and in the mutual self-devotion of wedded life. We reckon upon it for every community, in the power of public spirit, loyalty, patriotism, philanthropy; otherwise no great national life would be possible. We reckon upon it for the whole race, as true civilisation advances, as all nations—most of all the strongest and bravest—feel that their strength carries with it the duty of service to all humanity, and as international public opinion throws its ægis of protection over the helpless.

And, if you consider the thing, my brethren, you will see that the lower law of self-preservation and selfishness is the sign of



finiteness and weakness, which must concentrate all its little power on the struggle to live, while the higher law of self-forgetful beneficence is the generosity of strength, delighting in the nobler blessedness of such giving, as may help the weaker to live and to be happy. Hence of the Almighty source of all power we feel how natural it is (so to speak) to be taught that "God is Love." Hence, just in proportion to his imperfect participation in that Divine power, man is bidden "to be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful."

Can we wonder that, as I have already said, the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth was a regeneration and an exaltation of this great law of humanity? As the true Son of Man, in a world like this, struggling against the force of selfishness and sin, He added (if I may so say) to the inexhaustible wealth of Divine Mercy the spirit of self-sacrifice in love for the sake of those whom He would save; and, on the very threshold of His Kingdom, for all who would follow Him, He set forth not only the glad duty of self-denial—that is, of self-forgetfulness and self-devotion for God and man—but even the sadder duty, which the sin of the world forces on Him and on us, of taking up the cross of sacrifice, in life and in death. Here, as always, the Christian's duty is, on the one hand, only the purification and exaltation of the duty of humanity, as made in the image of God; while yet, on the other, it recognises the actual condition of suffering and sin and death, under which, as St. Paul declares—in words brought out into larger and more vivid conception by the increase of human knowledge—"the whole creation groans, and travails in pain together, even until now."

(II.) I ask you to-night to apply this general conception of the Christian's duty to the particular case of his relation to the animal creation. That relation is surely one full of deep and manifold importance. I cannot conceive how any thoughtful mind can fail to find in the very contemplation of the animal creation a strong intellectual and moral interest.

To the intellect, what can be more striking than the consideration of the animal world as a whole, in its almost infinite complexity of gradation, from the rudimentary forms which our best science can hardly distinguish from vegetable life, up to the higher organisations, which have so much of startling similarity to our own human nature—not only in what we call instinct, which within the visible sphere of sensation is certainly not to be distinguished in kind from reason—but even more in the crude instinctive forms of what we recognise as moral qualities, loyalty and obedience, fidelity and love? True it is, that, whatever ingenious theories scientific imagination may weave as to the connection of man with the lower creation, in body and mind and character, there is, as a matter of unquestionable fact, discerned by a broad common-sense, a great gulf fixed between



the lowest phase of humanity and the highest animal development—as infinite and impassable as the great division between lifeless matter and organic life. But still, in spite of this fundamental division, we cannot but study with keen and ever increasing interest, these capacities of the lower creatures—at least with the effect of acknowledging intellectual and moral relations to the animal world—perhaps (as human thought has insisted on doing again and again), with some speculation whether what is moral in them may not be imperishable—incapable of being altogether destroyed by the bodily change which we call death.

But I do not know whether there is not something still more striking and still more sadly impressive on the moral side; when we contemplate in that creation what seems to us constant and boundless waste of life, mainly through the mutual destruction, with its accompaniments of infinite pain and suffering, which turns the whole world into a battlefield of ceaseless struggle and death; and when we seek for reconciliation of this—not so much by understanding as by faith—with the higher and more certain truth, which we can never let slip, that God, all wise and all gracious, makes and loves them all.

But at these mysterious subjects I only glance in passing, rather with a view to stimulate quiet thought and enquiry upon them; and I turn now to the only question which concerns us plainly and directly, and to which, therefore, we must find an answer here. What is the true human, and, therefore, the true Christian, duty of us all to the lower creation, which God has in different degrees put in subjection under our feet?

(III.) Now, it is clear that in regard to them, the lower law of self-preservation and self-interest in humanity must have its place. Man has to play his leading part in the dispensation of God to the world in which he lives; and, so far as it is needful for the right discharge of that part, he may use, in some degree he must sacrifice, the creatures over which God has made him lord. There are the wild creatures, dangerous to his existence and progress—the beast of prey, the poisonous snake, the noxious and destructive insect. As mankind extends over the world, these must give way: for they will destroy man, if man does not destroy them. There are the creatures, wild or tame, which are fit for man's food; they must be killed for that food; otherwise, again, they would overrun the world, and (so to speak) starve man out of it. There is the class of creatures nearest and dearest to us of all—the ox, the cow, the horse, the dog—which we domesticate to be our servants in the cultivation and civilisation of the world, and which by domestication we come in a very true sense to humanize, and, in the process, to know and to love. All these different classes of the animal creation man has in different ways a clear and undoubted right to use for the sake of his own



happiness and development. It is a strange impracticable exaggeration of humanity—although not (I think) without some pathetic beauty—to hold, as austere ascetics or mystics have held in ancient and modern days, that to destroy consciously any animal life is an unwarrantable cruelty, even a sin against Him who made it. Not, indeed, without some wonder and pain do we contemplate the grim necessity, under which man has to treat the lower creatures as they treat each other, and so, in the strict sense of the word, to condescend to the brute level. Not without reluctance do we consent, when we think of it, to realise how many animal existences are sacrificed for one average human life. Not without much difficulty and contrariety of opinion do we solve the questions, which arise again and again, how far we may inflict pain and take life, for the training of men in hardihood and skill and enterprise by sport, or for the scientific and medical advance of mankind. Like all selfish action, however necessary, it is a grief to our true humanity—one of the hardnesses of this life, of which we delight to think that it was not in Paradise, and shall not be in the perfect kingdom of the hereafter.

Therefore, while this necessity is recognised, yet, just in proportion as the education of the world advances, there is an ever clearer and more reverent recognition of the higher principle of humanity towards the brute creatures—to temper and guide, to control and limit, the exercise of dominion, lest it become an oppressive and bloody tyranny. It has its negative and positive side—the negative prohibition of all wantonness and cruelty—the positive cultivation of gentleness, kindness, and sympathy.

To stop or check cruelty—the cruelty which, in its various forms, goes on around us every day, outraging humanity and sinning against the mercy which is God's chief will and attribute—might seem in itself alone to tax, and overtax, all our power. Even with regard to the animals which we must destroy for safety, or may destroy for food, there is a cruelty of wantonness in the needless and useless destruction of life, which makes some so-called books of sport records of repulsive butchery, and sacrifices innocent and harmless lives to the mere amusement of the moment, or mechanical contest of skill. There is a cruelty of hard inhuman thoughtlessness; inflicting on the animals which we kill for food unnecessary pain, even to lingering agony, either because men will not take a little pains and thought to avoid it, or because by cruel methods of slaughter they may gain some miserable advantage, real or fancied, in the market. There is a similar cruelty of recklessness, when men, by overstocking their stations, or neglecting all attempts at water storage, deliberately expose hundreds of thousands of animals to lingering death by thirst and hunger, contented if hereafter they may compensate themselves for pecuniary loss; or when they carry



them long journeys over the country, without caring to provide against needless suffering through overcrowding and want of food and drink. There is even—what becomes in the hardened soul the very image of Satan—a love in the exercise of cruelty for cruelty's sake, an inhuman delight in the sight of writhing pain, or in the conscious wielding of power over helplessness. Need I say to you that this is to assert our dominion over the lower creation, as though it were the gift of the devil, and not of the wise and loving God? Yet I do not know whether these various forms of cruelty do not find an even larger and far more inexcusable opportunity of wreaking themselves on the creatures domesticated for our service. How terrible, in the records of the Society for which I speak to-night, are the stories of cruelty to these domestic animals—very often in ignorance, but an ignorance which is wilful, and therefore culpable—often in passion, over what is, or seems to be, stubbornness or vice, which lowers man below the level of the very creatures he torments—now in the stupidity believing in violence, and c. violence alone—now in deliberate sacrifice of the animal to work for which it is incapable or insufficient, for the sake of some miserable gain of our own self-interest—sometimes, unhappily, in that worst form of malignant cruelty, which inflicts absolute agony in mere fiendish sport, or in fiendish revenge and tyranny. To check, even to mitigate, such cruelty, might well seem all that we could even attempt.

But, important as it is, yet it is not enough in itself; and, moreover, if it be content with this merely negative attitude, it will never stand. It is a poor lordship, after all, which is satisfied with not oppressing or tormenting its subjects, and never cultivates towards them the spirit of active beneficence and sympathy. Cruelty, like all other evils in man, is best driven out, not by mere watchfulness and chastisement, but by the expulsive force of positive good; and that good in us will prevail, just in proportion as it feels and knows that it is the image and the imitation of God Himself. Compassion, sympathy, delight in beneficence towards the animal creation, belong to man's true nature, asserting themselves in different degrees of natural gift; they can be, like all other instincts, developed by teaching and training in the young; and they increase, moreover, with the intelligent study of animal natures, which brings out, even in those which seem least promising, the shadows at least of intellectual and moral qualities, investing them with a kind of personality. But, like all other graces of humanity, they can fight a victorious battle against the germs of selfishness, tyranny, cruelty in the soul, only under the higher consciousness of God. There is something in that sense of the dependence of all creatures alike upon the love and fatherhood of the one God—whom we know clearly, and whom the lower creatures, we think,



may know, by half-blind instinct—expressed in the well known lines—

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things, both great and small ;  
For the dear God, who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

And yet, perhaps, there is even more in the opposite consciousness, suggested by my text, that we are (so to speak) God's representatives to them, to whom, as has often been said, they look up with a large measure of the reverence and trust due properly to Him, and by whom, as the experience of ages has shown, their very nature can be educated and exalted. We, if we feel this in ever so slight a degree, must catch some measure at least of God's own divine sympathy for all His creatures. And while, unlike Him, we receive very much from the creatures which are our servants, must rejoice in being like Him in the "blessedness of giving."

(1291) It is this exercise of true humanity, which the Animals Protection Society has long been labouring patiently to enforce and inculcate. Let me say to you, my brethren, that here it does priceless general service to the whole community in the formation of national character; for nothing is more certain than that cruelty and humanity are universal in their exercise towards our fellow creatures. The brutalizing effect of the one, and the softening and exalting force of the other, tell on our relations not only to animals but to men; nay, tell even on our powers of knowing and loving God.

Against known cruelty it appeals boldly to the power of the law, which is one of the glories of the English statute book, and which (let me remind you), like most other laws, if it is to be enforced, needs vigilant sympathy, and willingness to take some trouble for its enforcement, from all English citizens. The records of its history, year by year, while they sicken us by their disclosures of cruelty, selfishness, and hard-heartedness, yet show us how much they can be checked, and are checked, by the strong hand of the law. But everywhere, and especially in this thinly-peopled country, where the force of law can never reach the outlying settlements and stations, there must be still greater reliance on the creation of right public opinion, and on the development of individual sense of humanity. Men must be chiefly a law to themselves; their higher nature must be developed by free scope. And here let me urge especially the instruction and education of the young, which "the Bands of mercy," as they are well called, so greatly promote. In children you see the contradictions of human nature—natural kindness (for example) and natural cruelty—come out in crude and striking simplicity; and it is in the young mind that ignorance can be best removed, cruelty best shamed and punished, and sympathy best cultivated. Every-



where we must trust ultimately to moral influence. I believe much in the dissemination of literature—not so much the exposures and denunciations of cruelty (which have the obvious drawback of occasionally suggesting what they desire to get rid of), as the cultivation of knowledge, sympathy, love towards the lower creatures. But I desire to see even more direct forces of teaching brought to bear. I would pray parents, in this matter as in all others, to remember the sacred duty, which they can rightly devolve on no other authority, of training, by example and teaching, the true humanity of their children. In our schools, especially in our Sunday schools, I know not what is done, but I am sure much may be done, to develop humanity in the young, with infinite result of good to their true moral education. In our churches from time to time—in right subordination, of course, to the higher and holier subjects which form their main teaching—it is, I think, well that we should consider what the Bible has to declare, and what the very conception of Christian faith and duty must imply, in respect of this phase of true humanity.

That there is need, great need, among us of all influences in this good cause I cannot doubt. We have to fight against an evil found everywhere in sinful human nature, but fostered, I think, especially by some of the circumstances of life here, and by some of the habits, ideas, characteristics of these modern days. Glad shall I be, if any word spoken to-night induces any of you to help the Society, by which I have been asked to speak. But, in some way, this or any other, I ask you seriously to consider what is Christian duty in this matter, and to endeavour to do it—for the sake, indeed, of the helpless and suffering creatures whose cry goes up to God, but not less for the sake of humanity, and therefore for the sake of Christianity itself.

For all authority we shall have to give an account when the great Lord of all comes again. Most strictly and most solemnly. I know, for the authority over our fellow men, and for the power which we have to aid the poor, the suffering, the erring, and the sinful. But yet most truly for the lordship over God's creation, so wonderful and so beautiful in all its lower orders of being. And if, over and above the universal human consciousness of the Almighty Wisdom and Righteousness, the Gospel teaches most emphatically of all, that "God is Love," and that only he who loves can know God and be like him, then we, as Christians, have a special responsibility in relation to these tenderer and sweeter duties of humanity. God grant us to know and feel this responsibility! There is a glorious passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where he speaks of the whole creation, as groaning under the burden of life, which rests most heavily on humanity, and rejoices to believe that it shall share in different degrees the "redemption, out of bondage, into the glorious liberty of the



children of God." They who believe this must surely find in it a charter of Christian sympathy with all orders of creation, in virtue of the inclusion of all, not only under the creative goodness, but under the redemptive mercy, of God.





