

I Creator and Creation

a. Environment: the Natural and Animal World

The Victorians and Edwardians had an inadequate sense of the rightful demand humankind's environment made. The powers of nature were being harnessed, nature was being subdued to the human will, mastery was annihilating mystery. It is true that nature was also thought of as an accomplice in the progress which was to bring people to an unknown, highly desirable goal¹. But always the thought of nature was man-centred - it was human ends which mattered. There was not that regard for nature which is prompted by the recognition of a genuine power, mysterious, limiting, capable of surprise-in-depth, truculent, which makes her not human property but in some sense a partner, whose co-operation has to be discreetly sought. Nature was often simply raw material for human enterprise. Alternatively, she could provide a haven for those who were wearied by industrialism. In neither case was our natural environment given a genuine status of its own.

Against this view, no substantive voice of Christian protest was heard. This world was a vale of tears, a stage on which the human drama of life was played, an expendable wrapping for the jewel of life beyond the grave; or the world was a seducer from God, with her cheap wares of transient pleasures and satisfactions. Coleridge's judgement that "we had purchased a few brilliant inventions at the loss of all communion with life and the spirit of nature"², looks back down the centuries. It was in mediaevalism that a hiatus between humankind and nature was accepted fully within the Christian tradition in Europe, and fable and legend were substituted for the realities of natural and of human history. First the Renaissance and Reformation, then the dawn of modern science and its application to the Industrial Revolution meant a new attention increasingly given to our environment. It was just at this point that the Victorian and Edwardian ages failed (and the reign of King George V interrupted by the Great World War, did nothing to remedy the defect). The Churches might have promoted a new recognition that nature had a status of its own derived from God, and that it existed for God's ends, not primarily human ends; and might have recovered something of the Biblical joy in creation instead of virtually denying creation a place in the work of redemption. Only now are we beginning to recover a sense of the need for us to co-operate with nature for larger ends³. Where nature is simply treated as a store of raw materials, people's association with nature in work becomes of merely passing significance, and a large part of life is evacuated of meaning. The status of nature and of humanity are only beginning to be seen⁴ as being indissolubly related. In Cunninghame Graham's time they were not so seen.

What has been said of the material world also refers largely to the animal creation. Domestic pets were treated fairly well. But many forms of animal and bird life were preserved just in time from the wholesale depredations of their hunters by the Trusts and

¹ It was Thomas Hardy's achievement that he revealed the falsity of reading purposiveness for good into the natural process.

² "Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians", p.42.

³ The shock of the advent of the atomic bomb strengthened this sense.

⁴ And even so, men like Dr George MacLeod were often prophets crying in a wilderness.

Associations which in our day have educated people to a new appreciation and responsibility.

Cunninghame Graham's estimation of the importance of the natural world seems to me to be not at all derived from philosophical argument (he never alludes to any) but from the direct eye of a humble person. He views the trees, the grass, the skies and plains with respect. The burning of jungle, to produce wood-ash, is not recognised by him to be a normal, natural proceeding.

"It made one wish to rend one's clothes, to think of the destruction of so much beauty in such a wanton way. Labour is scarce, and nature more exuberant than can be imagined in the north, and it may be the ashes fertilise the soil but I was glad at least that we had the ashes on our heads; it seemed that someone mourned"¹.

The closing words are not sentimental. They represent genuine grief at loss. Once only does he seem nearer affectation:

"....roses trailed from every balcony, uncared for, and rejoiced to find themselves unmanured, unpruned, not tied to sticks, nor crucified with nails against a wall"².

He preferred the wild-growing, untamed Arab garden to the British one. The rabbits made their burrows in the lawn at Gartmore, and played about unchallenged. His was a reaction, though in this case sentimentally expressed, against nature's being treated merely as one's servant, designed to conform to the pattern of one's eye and purpose.

Nature to him is sheer miracle. He recognises and rejoices in the mystery. One of the joys of reading him is "....his instinctive amateur feeling that his subject is always far more vast, more important, richer and more mysterious than anything he can write about it"³. So it is when he speaks of the natural world. I give one quotation illustrating his awed sense of wonder which is typical:

"The recurring and continual miracle of the flower and the leaf, the tides, day, night, and the mysterious rising of the stars, all which we know are really simple things, and follow natural laws and at the same time pass our comprehension to declare, still less to demonstrate"⁴.

It is with a mixture of contempt and despair over humankind that he views the demimonde society where "riches and vulgarity kissed each other:

"It seemed as one looked around, that the green fields, the sky, the trees, the songs of the birds, the joy of horses, the dawn, the tides, the rhythmical and murmurous motion of the spheres, night, day, the twilight, and all the rest of the mere natural miracles, which nobody can imitate, so few appreciate, and none of us can alter, stay, quicken, or retard, were but mere common things, which the assembled company either had never seen or comprehended, or if they had, imagined they could buy, or set on some inventive, but impractical poor man to counterfeit"⁵.

¹ "Cartagena and the Banks of the Simu", p.234.

² "Writ on Sand", p.100.

³ From a review of his book "Horse of the Conquest" published in the Christian Science Monitor, Boston, December 1930.

⁴ "Preface to "John Lavery and his Work" by Walter Shaw Sparrow cf. "His People", p.201, and "Redeemed", pp.64 and 69, written in similar vein.

⁵ "Hope", p.232.

This is condemnation, succinct. All lies in human power, all yields to human whim, it is thought; whereas the real joyous world lies beyond such blind ken and weak understanding.

He realises the loss because he is aware of the relationship which he conceives should exist between the human and natural creation. From time to time he catches:

".....a scent of something older than mankind, keen, subtle, vivifying, and which somehow connected man, by some unseen, uncomprehended essential oil or particle so small no microscope could make it manifest, with the whole universe"¹.

Nature to him has a being capable of supporting one side of this relationship. He is not striving for effect when he writes: ".....the powerful vegetation of the tropics writhes round their walls.and seems to press the life-blood out of them"²; or when he speaks of ".....a world that puts out all its strength in heat and rain, in floods, in pestilence, in monstrous and invading vegetation"³; or when he takes note, at home, of nature engaged in a stern flight for life "against the calamity of frost"⁴. He underlines further this existence of nature in her own right, when he speaks of her capacity for resistance. He notices. "the air of mystery and of hostility to man that emanated from the recesses of the everglades"⁵. He writes of the sea:

"The sea leaves marks upon its votaries that even time never entirely rubs out, perhaps because, being an element so hostile to mankind, the difficulty of accustoming oneself to all its moods alters a man for life"⁶.

Man's relation to nature is almost like that of marriage, where adaptation and mutual adjustment are required if life in any shape or form is to be possible. Cunninghame Graham therefore prefers those lands where nature has to be fairly reckoned with, where:

"One feels that nature is an actual force, not castrated and brought to heel by man, as in the countries men call civilised"⁷.

In the absoluteness of dominion is the loss.

Testimony to Cunninghame Graham's regard for animals is found in the numerous cuttings of instances of love, grief, fidelity and self-sacrifice on the part of animals and birds, which are preserved in his Scrap-Book. The capacity of birds and animals for self-forgetful care for their young and for their companions appears to have occupied his mind much; and from time to time he speaks of the unfavourable contrast presented by much of human life. His love of horses was notable. He was an exceptional horseman, a prince among horsemen. He was acquainted with horses of all kinds, and would describe their traits lovingly and accurately. W H Hudson said of him about the loss of

¹ "Faith", p.109.

² "Jose Antonio Paez", p.146.

³ "The Conquest of New Granada", p.38.

⁴ "Charity", p.90.

⁵ "Cartagena and the Banks of the Sinu", p.13.

⁶ "A Hatchment", p.132. He speaks of the influence of houses on their inhabitants similarly on page

⁷ "Cartagena and the Banks of the Sinu", p. 12.

his favourite horse Pampa in 1911, that he grieved more than he would have at the loss of many a relative. Well did he understand the relationship of the Spanish conquistadors to their mounts: "...a companionship and pride at the same time, such as a man may feel for a younger brother who has accompanied him in some adventure"¹. He speaks of his own mount in this way:

"He is part of me, I live on him and with him: he forms the chiefest subject of my conversation, he is my best friend, more constant far than man, and far exceeding woman"².

Cunninghame Graham succeeded in getting pit ponies brought under the care of inspectors of mines, and showed constant alertness in the House to any means of alleviating their lot. The poor cab-horses of London, some of them exiles from the free pampas where his own wild horses had been nurtured are written about feelingly. One such is memorably described, in its pilgrimage from his life as a foal in Entre Rios, through its fear-ridden journey across the seas, to its death as a gaunt image of itself, a cart-horse in London streets. People's uncaring attitude is piquantly noted at the end: the traffic reluctantly parts to go round the dead wreck of horse flesh, and then hurries on, as if fretted by any delay³. He writes again, castigating human beings for the false ends which they force animals to serve:

".....a million horses, turned to machines, chained in their stables, and taken out, but to pound ceaselessly upon the cruel stones till it was time to be led back again and chained up for the night, toiled wretchedly, not comprehending that they were agents in the progress of the world"⁴.

Animals are, by us, turned into "meat-producing engines deprived of individuality"⁵.

The treatment of animals calls into question our whole outlook upon life: "...doubtless every kind of bird was created but to teach men to shoot them on the wing"⁶. It calls into question the value of human life, in the instance of "...men of science who think mankind is worth the martyrdom of living dogs and cats"⁷. It brings into focus the Church's attitude as he sees it - animals have no souls, and that is that: "...the torturing of cats is not the Church's business"⁸. Indeed, it calls into question the scope of redemption. War, for horses, is "...the hell from which no saviour ever came down from heaven to save them. Of course, they had no souls, as good men tell us"⁹. He pictures a tired donkey which "...lay waiting the coming of a Son of Man to it and to its kind who should ride into the Jerusalem of all the animals"¹⁰. Those who have blessed man with hell, allow no paradise to beasts"¹¹.

¹ "Horses of the Conquest", p.2.

² "Father Archangel of Scotland", p.147.

³ The tale "Cavalry" in "Thirteen Stories".

⁴ "Faith", p.133.

⁵ "Success", p.61.

⁶ "Jose Antonio Paz", p.11.

⁷ "Thirteen Stories", p.216.

⁸ "Faith", p.47.

⁹ "Mirages", p.162.

¹⁰ "Redeemed" p.122.

¹¹ "Thirteen Stories", p.199.

No answer is given to the query he raises about the place of animals in the scheme of creation and redemption. As is often the case, he states a matter, from a different angle from that which is customary, and leaves it at that. But his love for the Arabic legend that animals once talked and were able to communicate fully with humans, often referred to, indicates his conviction that we and animals are associates in the Creation, not strangers, nor completely contrasted in rights and status. He does not count people and beasts of equal value. He would have turned his favourite horse Pampa, to its death, rather than ridden over a child, however much the loss of Pampa might have grieved him. But he asks:

"Is there at bottom some mysterious bond between all living things, which, but for our religion and conceit, should have all the animals and us one clan?"¹. It is the question which Robert Burns asked in his poem "To A Mouse"

Just as he and Gabrielle feel that we have lost certain senses through neglect of them, which once put us into closer relationship with the natural and animal world, so he feels a loss of kinship, which "progress" produces. A Highland shepherd and his dog turn his mind to "the old communion of all living things, the lost connection between man and all the other animals, which modern life destroys"², and he lays the destruction at the door of man's aspiration "not to equality but to command" lest he should "incur the burden of the sorrow of the winds, the trees, the beasts". It is thus that man becomes "an outcast from his kind"³.

It appears that at no point did Cunningham Graham find a Biblical interpretation of life which gave adequate significance to the natural and animal creation. Yet, in essentials, his outlook fits a Biblical vic better than any other.

Our part on the earth is to "have dominion over"⁴ to "replenish and subdue"⁵ to "dress and keep"⁶ the earth. Yet not as lord but as trustee. When we act as lord and break the relationship with God, for whom the earth was made, the whole natural order feels the effect⁷. The world does not have equal status with human beings⁸, who alone are made in the image of God, constituted by the in-breathing of God's Spirit. But its status is not that accorded to it by us the trustee, but by God the Lord. The edelweiss, not even seen by the human eye during its life, yet blooms to God and fulfils its being when it fulfils God's purpose⁹.

The significance of Adam's naming of the animals in the world as God intended it to be, deserves attention. I believe it underlines the conception of trusteeship indicated elsewhere. Adam (Everyman) separates the species by naming them, and since he

¹ "Thirteen Stories", p.199.

² "His People", p.218: cf. "Mogreb-el-Aeksa", p.198.

³ *Ibid.*, p.240.

⁴ Genesis, 1: vv. 26, 28.

⁵ Genesis, 1: v. 28.

⁶ Genesis, 2: v. 15.

⁷ Genesis, 3: vv. 17, 18.

⁸ In the Bible, Man's part is to command, not to seek equality with the animals: the source of Creation's sorrow is not in this aspiration.

⁹ Cunningham Graham makes the point that it was for some good purpose of His own that God jewelled Florida with flowers in "Hernando de Soto", p.50.

knows the name of each (according to ancient understanding) he has power over them. Yet though they are not made in the image of God, they came "out of the ground", as man does, and have a kinship of creatureliness. The association depicted is one of authority and kinship, of the dependence of animals on humankind and the dependence of both on God.

Though Cunningham Graham does not argue that "animals have souls", he does find the denial of this belief associated with the degradation of their status. Actually the hope for the earth is not that they "have souls" or will be found to be made "in the image of God", but that, according to their own manner of creation, they will be fulfilled. About the manner of that fulfilment, Christ speaks not at all, little as he spoke of the manner of human fulfilment.

But in the New Testament, the created order is not dealt with as an expendable backcloth for the drama of humanity. The whole creation groans and travails, waiting for its redemption¹. It is by Christ and for Christ that all things were created - in Him is the fulfilment of all creation². All things are to be subdued to Him and brought back to God³. The final promise is of a new Heaven and a new Earth⁴.

When Christ rode into the Jerusalem of humankind, he was also riding into the Jerusalem of all animals, and of the hills and trees.

¹ Romans, 8: vv. 20-23.

² Colossians, 1: v. 16.

³ 1 Corinthians, 15: v. 28.

⁴ Revelation, 21: v. 1.