

CRUELTY AS PLEASURE.

MAN'S MONOPOLY.

A MYSTERY OF NATURE.

(By Dr. A. Shadwell.)

In *The Times* of January 12 was a telegram from Shanghai which quotes a Swatow correspondent on the Communist reign of terror in the Haifung and Lufung districts. He says:— "It is not merely massacre, but massacre with fiendish delight in cruelty and in gloating over the agonies of the victims. . . . Those are regarded as fortunate who are summarily shot or beheaded, but many poor wretches have undergone the agony of dismemberment or the historic slicing process with new refinements of cruelty before they were allowed to die." I quote this intelligence, which was confirmed on January 18, partly because it is recent, but still more because it accurately describes the kind of cruelty to which I wish to draw attention.

The word cruelty is loosely applied in everyday use to a great many conditions, which involve, or are believed to involve, suffering, whether of body or mind. People do not think about the nature of cruelty, but they nevertheless discriminate roughly between different grades; and it will be found, I think, on examination, that they are influenced by two considerations. One is the extent of suffering caused, the other is the motive. The former forms no valid criterion, because suffering varies indefinitely among human beings with race, custom, upbringing, expectation, and other conditions, which change from age to age; and we have no accurate knowledge of what the other animals suffer, though we can to some extent judge from the demeanour of domestic animals. In extreme cases, such as that of a cat soaked in petrol and then set fire to, there is no doubt that it suffered all the pain of which it was capable; but, on the other hand, a dog run over and wounded to death gave no sign of suffering on being taken in and tended till it died. I do not mean that to run over a dog is not cruel, but only that the suffering caused is too indeterminate a factor to permit one to base grades of cruelty upon it. We are driven to the motive, and judged by this I would distinguish three grades of cruelty:—(1) that committed with an ulterior motive, which may be good or bad or doubtful; (2) that committed in thoughtlessness, which entails no conscious motive; (3) that committed of set purpose for its own sake. In all these it should be understood that judgment is also influenced by the amount of suffering inflicted.

FOOD AND SPORT.

(1) By far the greatest number of cases belongs to the first class. It includes war, the chase, trapping, vivisection, slaughter for food, the marketing of live produce, menageries and creatures in captivity, set contests such as bull-fights, the baiting of sundry animals, punishment for offences. Generally speaking there is a growing tendency in Western nations to regret and minimize cruelty in these cases. In war the most frightful cruelties are inevitable, which is one reason for its abolition; but the ulterior object is still held to justify them, though that feeling is perceptibly weakening. In the chase a distinction should be drawn between marauding animals, dangerous to mankind and to domestic creatures, and those pursued for sport or professional reasons. In the first case the object of self-preservation overrides the element of cruelty altogether. No one, I imagine, is interested in the amount of cruelty inflicted on a pack of marauding wolves or on a man-eating tiger, though there may be pride in the record of a clean kill. In the chase for sport or as a profession, by big game hunters and trappers, the case is different. The overriding factor of self-preservation is not present and the object is doubtful. Here the amount of suffering comes in. Many people, while allowing the chase, think it cruel to pursue a red deer in the sea or to dig out a fox, and would insist on humane traps. It is a large field and full of doubts. With vivisection the ulterior object is the advancement of knowledge, which is held to be good, though in this country the law insists on minimizing the cruelty by generally prescribing anæsthetics. There is a vast amount of unnecessary cruelty inflicted in slaughter-houses and in marketing and generally in the treatment of domestic animals—more, probably, than in all the other fields put together, for it is universal and continuous.

Here the law steps in to decide whether particular acts are cruel or not, and how far they may be extenuated by the ulterior object. It shows how opinion changes that before 1822 there was no law prohibiting cruelty to animals, and that the first Act on the subject was passed only after a long agitation; before that the owner of an animal or anyone licensed by him could do anything he pleased to it. In many of the cases brought up now under the Acts the cruelty belongs to the third grade: it is deliberate.

CAPTIVE ANIMALS. 7

Protection is to a certain extent applied also to wild creatures in this country by the Act of 1900, which illustrates my point by making exception of acts done for food or sport; these are ulterior objects. Set contests, as well as baiting, were prohibited in 1849. The object here is nothing but amusement, which is plainly held inadequate. Bull-fighting, in which there is much cruelty for the sake of amusement, is only tolerated, I believe, by Spaniards. With regard to menageries and captive wild things, they serve for instruction as well as amusement; but whether they are justified is a moot point. For creatures which take kindly to captivity it may well be; but all are not like that. I shall never forget the ceaseless rhythmical efforts to escape of a polecat in the Zoological Gardens of Petersburg and of an otter at Copenhagen. Confinement seemed to have driven them mad, as it does dogs, which change their nature and become sullen and morose when too strictly confined. I cannot think such cases justified by the ulterior object. And the same is true of several kinds of caged birds, whose capture also entails much cruelty. Speaking generally, one may say that mere pleasure is insufficient to justify even a small amount of cruelty. Let us remember the lesson which Wordsworth divided with the shepherd at Hart Leap well:—

Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

The treatment of prisoners under legal sentence presents peculiar difficulties, because it raises the question of the object of punishment and also because the valuation of cruelty varies widely with individuals. It may be laid down, however, that the law has nothing to do with actual cruelty according to the current standard, and if this occurs it is due to some defect in the apparatus or to some wrong-doing on the part of an administrator, who misses the opportunity, not to promote the real ulterior object but to gratify his own feelings. In short, it belongs to the third grade. This appears to have been the case with Dr. Lipinski's treatment at Tiflis, for he was ordered to the hospital by the new commandant. His experience goes to show that in Russia political prisoners are frequently treated with extreme barbarity, which means either that the administrators of prisons are under no control, but do as they please, or that the whole thing is a part of the present system of administration. Charles Reade has shown in his novel.