HOW I AM AN ANTI-VIVISECTIONIST.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The Brown Dog business, and the starting of a Society for the Freedom of Research, have brought the question of vivisection back to my mind, and reopened the discussion of it between my own wishes and scruples. And as this is a question which every individual has to think out individually before it can be resolved once for all by the averaging action of public opinion, it may be of use to put before the readers of the *Morning Post* not a foregone-conclusion-pleading with its evasions and sophisms, but the inner experience of one particular person. I am going to talk about myself, not because I consider my attitude about vivisection particularly original, but because I happen to know why I hold it.

I thought I had attained to certainty on the subject of vivisection when, some twenty-five years ago, I included in my book of Dialogues called "Baldwin" an elaborate paper on the subject. I have no copy of that book at hand, and I have no very distinct recollection of the particular dialogue. Neither do I consider myself as bound by whatever I may have thought or written in the past; indeed, it is because I am aware of having shifted my position that I am writing in the present. I refer to that dialogue because it is a detail in the little examination of conscience which, regarding it as my most useful contribution to the discussion, I am herewith attempting. Suffice it therefore that my dialogue expressed the opinion that vivisection, although scientifically and therefore medically useful, was morally to be condemned, and, being condemned, to be utterly and completely forbidden.

That is what I thought and wrote twenty-five years ago. I want to explain why I write differently now.

First of all, let me insist upon the fact that it is not because I have altered my views as to the scientific and practical value of vivisection: my dialogue made short work (too short work for my anti-vivisectionist friends) of the preposterous attempts to teach physiologists and physicians what was, or what was not, useful in their own business. Vivisection, I maintained then, as I maintain now, is most valuable, useful; it is indispensable for certain objects; but it and its objects should be dispensed with. This opinion I still hold. The change that has come is a change, not in opinion, but in attitude: in the way the opinion is held and the applications which are deduced from it. The change has been that from the cocksureness of youth to the scepticism, perhaps the faint-heartedness, of middle age; it has also, let me confess it at once, been a change from hyper-sensitiveness to a degree of indifference. Vivisection no longer seems to me the most glaring wrong which the world contains. Added experience has shown me that it is only one of the horrors of a world which might correctly be inventoried as a *succursale* to Madame Tussaud's attractive Chamber: I cannot, like many anti-vivisectionists, allow vivisection to occupy the whole of my moral focus. Moreover, I cannot allow any human to do this. For I have learned that if one focuses horrors, if one allows nightmare to interfere with one's daily happiness, one becomes maniacal and useless; I have recognised that the evil in the world and in man cannot be got rid of merely by weeding it out: you must extirpate it by an ever richer and more vigorous crop of good. I do not much believe in specialising against vivisection; I believe in developing the sympathetic imagination and solidarity-sense in general. Vivisection as a practice is far more interfered with, and far more criticised as a theory, in England than on the Continent; more in the progressed and busy Continental countries than in the poor and beggared ones. I imagine that the rights of science to torture animals *ad libitum* would have been conceded without difficulty in the times and countries when men of science were occasionally themselves burnt "ad majorem Dei gloriam": Calvin, I take it, would have grudged Servetus no amount of "Brown Dogs." Why! the one case of State-subsidised experimentation on the human subject was in that same Italy of the Catholic Reaction which burnt Giordano Bruno: "Princeps jubet ut nobis dent hominem, quem *nostromodo* interficimus et illum anatomisamus," wrote Fallopius. And no wonder, considering that the same Princeps and every other Princeps of the time (indeed until the anti-man-vivisection crusade of Beccaria and the Eighteenth Century philosophers) authorised not only that condemned malefactors should be killed piecemeal through a long holiday afternoon, but that quite innocent persons (you or I, had we been looking out of window or crossing the street at the moment of a murder) should be tortured any number of times over, till the attendant doctor recognised immediate danger to life, and this to obtain such immediate and unstinted evidence as was necessary for the maintenance of public safety.

This illustration has been long and, you may think, divagating: but it has saved useless abstractions, and allowed me to blurt out my opinion: that vivisection, while a scientific necessity, is a moral anachronism. For, if by some quite conceivable difference in historical coincidences, physiology had attained importance two or three centuries later than it has, the question of vivisection would never have arisen, because the buying of scientific and medical information at the expense of the frightful experiments described in physiological literature would have been as incompatible with the more developed conscience of our descendants as the obtaining of analogous information by experimentation on criminals and degenerates is already incompatible with our present moral development.

This opinion explains my present position on the question. I no longer discuss vivisection on the basis of either sentiment or justice, because I have recognised that the quality of sentiment and the standard of justice are, thank Heaven, not who happened to be real saints. But I believe that the humanity of vivisectors cannot be relied on, because I believe that the greatest saints cannot be trusted round the corner when the object for which they have sacrificed their life, and in which they have vested all their aspirations and ideals, is at stake. Indeed, it is my opinion that the more saintly they are, and therefore feel themselves to be, the less they can dispense with the surveillance of such sinners as happen not to be devoted to the same ideals and therefore not tempted to the same self-justification.

In fact, my attitude on the subject of vivisection has come to be this: That the practice is indispensable for the solution of the present problems of physiology and its derived sciences, but (and I will trouble veracious critics to quote this passage as a whole and not, as both anti-vivisectionists and pro-vivisectionists equally do, chopped up for the sake of argument)—but that the practice of vivisection (meaning thereby not experiments on living animals as such, but experiments of a torturing nature) is incompatible with the moral standards, the sympathising imagination to which the more developed of us have partially attained, and which with every day's additional development we are more and more bound to respect. Vivisection, I am glad to repeat it, is at once a contemporary scientific necessity and a growing moral anachronism. And if you ask: "Why moral anachronism?" I refer you for answer to the whole insistence on its being "painless," "conducted with humanity," "indispensable," and to Professor Janes's comparison of the Vivisector with the Divinity whose ways require justification. This being the case, I believe that it is hopeless to suppress it entirely and desirable to suppress it as nearly as possible. The Future will, with the unblushingness of all Progress, accept its legacy and disown its memory. For one of the peculiarities of this paradoxical case (since what more paradoxical than a recrudescence of torture for the sake of alleviating suffering?) is shown in the fact that I, for instance, identify all moral, because all social and educational, progress with the progress of the scientific spirit which has contracted this new-fangled vice of vivisection. Similarly, the disconcerting anomaly of the whole question is also shown by the fact that a chief reason making me anxious that vivisection should be attacked and restricted to the utmost is my disgust at the thought that many of the men I venerate most devoutly, many of the studies which interest me most passionately (for psychology and sociology are close relatives of physiology) are smirched with the horrible thing from which my imagination and self-respect revolt.

The publication of this view will doubtless be resented by anti-vivisectionists, and perhaps—who knows?—(with judicious editing) be made into capital by the defenders of the Freedom of Research. But although I wish well to both these associations, deeming that their various over-statements and under-statements and the lusty deeds of medical hooligans tend to public discussion and public regulation of vivisection, it is my opinion that the casting vote will eventually belong to a minority like myself. If vivisection be gradually restricted to fewer and fewer experiments; if it gradually cease to be a habitual method for discovering whether there is anything to discover; if it be, even on the Continent, eliminated altogether for educative purposes; if, in fact, the progress of the age evolve away this anomalous factor of progress, why, I venture to believe it will be due largely to Yes-and-No people like myself. For, after all, what can those who, like Mr. Browning, sneer at vivisection for examining "how brain secretes dog's soul"; what can those who, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, satirise doctors for trying to prove the existence of their special disease; what, above all, can the mass of sentimental ignoramuses oppose to the determination of a scientific minority which says: "The proof of this regrettable method being necessary is that we employ it"?

But, on the other hand, what, in the long run, can even the highest scientific authorities answer to the verdict of those who shall say: Many things would be useful, desirable for human progress, but human progress itself has made some of them (such as hospital experiments) inacceptable?

And thus it is because I believe in salvation through knowledge that I think that we pious lay folk must be on the watch against possible Moloch-worship, and see to the priests of Science serving Posterity and ourselves with unsoiled hands and unhardened consciences.—Yours, &c.,

Florence, August 1. VERNON LEE.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

the standard of justice are, thank Heaven, not the unchangeables we once used to think them. Also, because I have learned that the sentiment and the justice of any particular time or class of persons can persuade itself that sacrifices of others are really sacrifices of oneself and one's tenderest feelings, for higher aims, &c. These are, after all, questions of moral taste, which, I repeat it with gladness, is liable to fashion. Has not one of the humanest and most puritanic scientific moralists, Professor William James, found no apter argument (vide his "Will to Believe") for explaining away the problem of Evil than by comparing the Supreme Being to a physiologist, whose benevolent proceedings the vivisected dog would piously accept if his poor canine intelligence were able to compass their meaning?

Well, I imagine that had Professor William James and all the other physiologists, biologists, and experimental psychologists, nay, had their very insignificant reader and admirer Vernon Lee flourished in the time of, say, Marcus Aurelius, we should all of us have profited quite enormously by the obvious method of testing hypotheses concerning human beings by direct trial on human beings; particularly all those delicate matters of brain and nerve localisations, those nice and crucial questions about pain, which are so much obscured by the unfortunate inarticulateness of animal sounds. Why, human vivisection would have settled "psycho-physical parallelism"; it would almost have united the subjective and objective in one inquiry!

As I write these words the "Doctor Moreau's Island" horror oddly fades out of my mind; and I actually catch in myself a glow of enthusiastic regret. Oh, if only antiquity had cultivated the biological sciences! If only Professor James had flourished at the time that bons-vivants could feed lampreys with second-rate cooks how many medical and educational problems would have been solved! how many diseases of body and soul would have been spared! How long ago would madness, prostitution, criminality have been eliminated! How healthy, how wise, how good we should all be!

This is not irony. The good qualities of the present are born very often of qualities which—well, which the present would send us to prison for possessing. I do not believe, as I have said, in fixed standards; I believe in progressive ones.

And now for the second reason for my particular attitude. I do not believe that a vivisector, even a Continental, uninterfered with vivisector, a physiologist familiarised with cutting up, baking, poisoning, and electrifying live animals with no anæsthetic but only that convenient paralysing drug curare through every stage of his education as other boys are familiarised to declension and sums—I do not believe that the most callous vivisector need be a cruel man. Did not Marcus Aurelius, already mentioned as a convenient Hero of Humanity, look on at worse things than vivisections every holiday at the amphitheatre, and silence the sentimental selfishness of Christian saints by making them contribute with their persons to those beneficial amusements of the poor, hard-worked people with which they so illiberally interfered? I do not believe that vivisectors need be cruel men, because I have known of some