

Thank God for Tails

FILE: TAILS FINAL

by Desmond Ford

I was out walking two of the three Black sisters. Actually only two of them are girls—the third is a male. But Gill called them that, and I never argue with Gill unless its over something very important—such as “I’m thinking of going shopping”\

Anyway here I was on the road with two of the Black sisters, including the one that is male. And he was hanging behind. So I called, and then said to Ebony who was with me “Trierer is a lazy dog.”

Now, the truth is Trierer is **not** a lazy dog. When we all walk along the canal he will jump into the water fifty times, swim, catch, retrieve and present. Yes, fifty times. I am not exaggerating, even though I ~~used~~^{trained} to be a journalist (1944-46).

But the point is this. When I said that Trierer was lazy, Ebony's tail wagged in appreciation of the joke. The truth is, and she knows it, she is the lazy one. Gill says it's because I feed her too much, but with two thirds of the world hungry, I can't bear the thought of adding another to that horrendous total. Anyway, Ebony's tail wagged. And it made me think.

You remember once that Sherlock Holmes told Watson that the key to the whole matter was in the behavior of the dog. I think that's true as regards the whole universe. The key to it is this matter of tails.

Canine experts might differ with me but I venture to suggest that tails aren't exactly vital. Dogs can manage without a tail, not as well, but manage none the less. And the world is full of tails. That's the point. That's the point of this tale about tails.

Why is it that in our universe there are all sorts of appendages not strictly necessary but which mostly contribute to our joy? Take these, for example. Color, melody, flavor, love, beauty. How's that for starters?

It was G. K. Chesterton who said that the trouble with the world is not that it is not reasonable, but that it is not altogether reasonable. I wonder why it is reasonable at all. Unless the Christian view is correct about a loving and wise Creator, why should the universe be reasonable? And in particular, why should it have so many tails? So many appendages not absolutely necessary but which give us continual joy and gladness. By us I mean almost everyone who lives across the planet.

We do take a lot for granted. Which one of us doesn't occasionally have the impulse to scratch? Some part of our anatomy for reason or reasons unknown demands attention. So we must scratch our shoulder or some other part of the body. But how is it that the body doesn't

continually register demands for scratches and in a hundred different places at once? Why not? To go from the ridiculous to the horrendous let me ask another question. How is it that most of the time most terrible contingencies don't happen? And if the mathematicians have a ready answer I will change the question to: how is it they don't happen much more often than they do?

Take headaches. We must be very finely tuned or headaches could be much more common than they are. Frankly who would want to live if life were one long migraine? Why isn't it? Many of us have suffered occasionally from this plague and it is a thousand times worse than awful. A friend of mine suffering a migraine went blind as he argued with his boss. Temporarily only, but it was not pleasant.

When my own brain has registered one of these Torquemadas I have been so incapacitated as not to be able to call for a glass of water. A fire in the house might have been welcome to end the torment—I am not sure I could have roused myself to avoid the flames. But I have a friend who has suffered these horrors regularly for over thirty years and they have not even stopped when they are supposed to—once one enters the fifties. He has known what it is to vomit and then give a public talk as though fully well.

What if headaches were more common (they are for some poor souls)? Or suppose life was one long uninterrupted cold in the head? Or a continual flu-like fever? I repeat, the equipoise of the body is wonderful. Its one of these tails which wags at once conveying its joyful message of a Creator.

Take beauty. But don't take it away for it is too precious. Consider what life would be like if everything was ugly and there were no flowers, sunsets, colors, or beautiful women. My time for matters purely esthetic is very minuscule but despite that my life would be impoverished considerably but for this "tail." Isn't that true for you?

Then there's laughter! Another marvelous tail! I have a friend in Australia notorious for his sense of humor. Notice I didn't say "noted" but "notorious," and many of us have thanked God for that fact. When Gill and I lived in England in the 1970s and were passing through some rather rough times, he wrote us repeatedly and lifted our spirits. Where would we be without this appendage of life—laughter?

There's too many of these "tails" to be the product of chance? Do not life's tails as they wag to our joy tell of One who joyously and lovingly made us for joy and love? Think of that next time you see a dog complete with his signal of joy.