SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT RESENTMENT

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**Most** of us are familiar with the picture, so dear to the hearts of Christian Scientists, called "Daniel's Answer to the King." The artist has portrayed the moment when the king, at whose command Daniel has been cast into the den of lions, comes, after a sleepless night, to see whether the captive is still alive. "O Daniel, servant of the living God," he cries, "is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" And the answer comes, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." There he stands,—the straight, slim figure, shoulders back, head erect, calm eyes raised to his questioner,—not the least hint of fear in his altitude, even though the beasts are still snarling at his feet. His hands are bound, but the very droop of the lax fingers shows an utter forgetfulness of the thing upon which he has deliberately turned his back.

As the present writer was studying the picture, impressed, as always, by that upturned, untroubled face, the thought came: "Suppose I had been thrown into a den of lions, and the man who had put me there had come creeping up at daylight to see how I was getting along: could I have looked up at him as did Daniel, and told him I hoped he would live for ever?" To be honest, she was sure that she could not. On the contrary, she would probably have let him know pretty plainly what she thought of him, and in the eyes of the world she would have been amply justified. But here another question quickly presented itself: If the resentment thus expressed had rankled in her heart all through that crucial night, would the morning have found her with her demonstration made? In other words, if Daniel had hated the king for his part in the transaction, would he have been delivered from the lions? Was it not his very freedom from resentment of the situation which had much to do with his deliverance from it? There is not a trace of anger on that quiet face; only the great stillness of a peace "which passeth all understanding."

As we ponder this, the old story of our childhood suddenly assumes a new significance, for are not we in this century, struggling with exactly the same problem? Humanity, in its mental processes, has undergone little change since Daniel's time, and the overcoming of resentment is perhaps one of the most common—as well as the most difficult—things that it ever finds itself called upon to do. Happily for us, the barbarous methods of the ancients have been outgrown; but he who fancies that persecution "for righteousness' sake" is a thing of the past, knows little of the nature of the carnal mind. Behind the arras of modern civilization still lurks the old cry, *"Ad liones!"* and many a modern Daniel, taking a stand for Truth, has found himself, figuratively speaking, hurled suddenly into a den of lions, whose snarling somehow sounded uncomfortably real! Even now, some one who reads these words may still be struggling to free himself from just such a mental environment, and to him Daniel's method will be of interest, for it is the right and the scientific way. He says to the king; "God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me."

Christian Science teaches that angels are "pure thoughts from God, winged with Truth and Love." "These angels deliver us from the depths" (Science and Health, pp. 298, 567). They spoke to Daniel, and as he listened it grew gradually clear that the man who had ordered him thrown to the lions, his friend the king, had really nothing whatever to do with the matter except as he allowed himself to be used by others. And who were these "others" who were influencing the king, and yet at the same time remained discreetly in the background? Going back a little in the narrative, we read: "Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. . . . Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel."

Come out from under cover, O "presidents and princes," and let us deal with the really guilty parties. But wait. In reasoning back from effect to cause, as we are doing, it is always important to decide whether we have reasoned back as far as we can go; and if our chain of reasoning seems to end by fastening itself about the neck of any human personality, we may be absolutely certain that we have not gone back far enough. For ever back of "him through whom the offense cometh," lies that which, as we are taught, has no entity whatever; and if evil does not always resolve itself into this, we may be sure that we have not yet readied the last analysis, but must work a little longer. In the case under discussion, "the presidents and princes" were undoubtedly back of the king, but what was back of "the presidents and princes"?

It is quickly seen, for today, as of old, envy, hatred, and revenge are easily detected. Here we seem to have come to the last link in the chain, and are eager to hurl against this impersonal offender the whole weight of our mental argument; but have we even yet reached the end? Is there not something back of envy, hatred, and revenge—even our own belief in them? Who, then, is the real enemy? Our Leader tells us: "Even in belief you have but one (that, not in reality), and this one enemy is yourself—your erroneous belief that you have enemies; that evil is real" (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 10). At last we have found the right place to strike the first blow! It is not the king, nor "the presidents and princes," but our own belief in any power apart from God which has delivered us to the lions.

But there is a liberator, even divine Love, and if we would be free from inharmonious conditions, we must begin by ceasing to hate (or even to dislike) the person whom we hold distinctly responsible for putting us there. When we begin to realize that our real need is not so much to get out of the den, as to be willing to say to the king, "Live for ever"! we also see that we have taken the first step toward bringing about our release. The effort is not great, when we learn to separate the error from the man; to remember that the real man, God's man, is lovable and loving; that he never did an unkind thing and never can do one, and that any word, look, or act which appears otherwise is only a suggestion from that which was "more subtil than any beast of the field," whose lying arguments have no power unless we admit them into our consciousness and believe in them.

Shall we,  as Christian Scientists, deny the reality of evil, and at the same time indulge in resentment over that which we steadfastly maintain does not exist? On the contrary, should we not, as Mrs. Eddy says, blush to name any mistake real? Perhaps the argument comes, "But people should not make mistakes; and the kind I cannot excuse are the ones made by people who should and do know better." Are we, then, so free from mistakes ourselves that we can afford to withhold forgiveness from others? Have we ourselves never uttered a word that later we could have wished unsaid? Have we never done anything which we have many times since longed to recall? Have we never been guilty of an error in judgment? Have we never impulsively spoken when we should have kept silent? Or weakly kept silent when we should have spoken? Said the apostle John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And if this state of self-deception so blinds us that we believe ourselves already perfect and infallible, it is "presumptuous human personality" which needs a rebuke, and needs it badly; for "the best of us," as the saying goes, "make mistakes." Even Peter, who afterward raised the dead, could not, at one time, raise his own thought above the point of denying his Lord. Yet, when "Jesus turned and looked upon Peter," does any one question whether it was anything but a look of ineffable love and forgiveness?

On his very cross Jesus prayed his Father to forgive those who were crucifying him, yet his own earthly career holds not the record of a single mistake. Should we not remember this, we who have perhaps been dragging along with us through weary years the memory of something unforgiven —and hence unforgotten? Once in the past there was a misinterpreted word, a misconstrued look, a misapprehended action, and the broken friendship, like Banquo's ghost, has haunted our footsteps ever since, and "will not down." And yet a misunderstanding is a thing so tiny at best—just a little seed, springing, perhaps, just from a difference in a point of view! And yet, when watered by angry tears, it has been known to grow in a single night to such proportions that very good friends have lost each other—for a while—in its labyrinth of shade. Should not the one who is first to struggle out into the sunlight count it a joy and a privilege to turn back and seek the other, still groping in the darkness? He saw the light first because he loved the most, and the one who loves the most will always make the first advance. Surely we would all be more gentle in dealing with an erring brother could we know under what difficulties he is working, and how heavy are the burdens which for the moment make his progress slow. He will drop them after a while, but in the mean time should we add to his load the weight of our condemnation? Humanly speaking, as some one has said,

We are all travelers, that throng A toilsome road together. And if some pilgrim, not so strong As I, but footsore, do me wrong, I'll make excuse—The way was long, And stormy was the weather.

There may be more people who have grown footsore in the long and wearisome journey up to Soul than we realize; and perhaps those very ones whom we think should and do know better, are also the ones who have borne the burden and heat of the day, and so deserve a little more love and a little more patience than the others. Never mind what they did to us, or what they didn't do—which is sometimes worse! Why not reach out a hand and say, "Error cannot separate God's children. Let us forget the past and begin again."

The night is far spent,—the long, cold night in which we wrapped ourselves in our pitiful rags of pride and self-righteousness and wondered why we were not warm,— and with the dawn comes the illumination of spiritual understanding which is God's day. The imprisoned thought, captive only of its own beliefs, lifts its eyes to a clearer perception of the allness of God, good, and the nothingness of evil; the lions, defrauded of their prey, slip softly back into their native nothingness; the bound hands fall apart, the stone walls crumble, and he who is blest in having "endured temptation," steps forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

No pure and simple life, true to itself, true to its Maker, was ever lived on this earth that was not a voice on God's behalf, however still and small, and that did not, in its sincere and humble way, declare a hope and reveal a faith which might well be the evidence of things unseen.

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