"THE SMELL OF FIRE"

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**PERHAPS** there is no story more dear to the heart of the Christian Scientist than that of the deliverance of the three young Hebrew captives from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. It is, indeed, so familiar to all of us, even to those who have hitherto been only casual readers of the Bible, that it needs no repetition here. There is one point, however, in connection with it which, though often dwelt upon, has particularly interested at least one student of Christian Science of late, and it is this: that after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were finally released, not only were their clothes unhurt and the hair of their heads unsinged, but not even "the smell of fire had passed on them."

"The smell of fire,"—that is where one endeavoring to understand the Scriptures in their true spiritual meaning and import may well give pause; for what, metaphysically speaking, is the smell of the fire? Is it not the remembrance of it, the sting of it, the resentment over it? ''The smell of fire" is the acknowledgment that an evil happened. It means that evil has a history. It means that although the fire is out now, it once existed, and we were in it. So insistently does this last argument seem to cling to consciousness that some of us go through the fire and every one smells smoke on us for years afterwards. When such is the case, can it be said that we, like those three of long ago, have come through the experience untouched?

Let us refuse to allow error to attach itself to us in any way, shape, or manner. Its claim that it once had activity, presence, power, cause, intelligence, or law is a false and spurious claim, and should be seen and handled only as its last, desperate effort, since all else has failed, to get itself perpetuated as a belief of memory. Let us refuse to give it life, even to that extent. Let us refuse to admit that evil ever had either a beginning or an ending. Let us refuse to admit that it ever was at all, even for one unholy moment. This, of course, by no means implies that we should not give grateful thanks for our deliverance from the belief in it, at the right time and in the right place, with the pure desire to help some one else who may be going through a similar experience. It only means that it does not facilitate the elimination of "the smell of fire" from our garments if we drag the remembrance of it around with us wherever we go, brooding over it unnecessarily in private, talking of it unnecessarily in public, and seeming to take a melancholy delight in recounting its unpleasant details. Will it daily grow beautifully less by any such procedure?

In the warfare which is wholly spiritual there should be no wounded veterans pointing to their scars with pardonable pride, simply because, if the fighting has been rightly done, there will be no scars to exhibit. "Trials are proofs of God's care," as we are told in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy ([p. 66](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=SH+66%3A10-11+&book=tfccs.main.sh)), and surely it is not in accord with the nature of Love that, when a proof of this tender care is given, the incident should be seared upon us with a permanent stamp of past suffering. God's ways are painless, easy, gentle, natural. It is only our rebellion over learning our much needed lessons which causes any suffering. Little children at school do not necessarily suffer and get scarred for life just because they pass from the Primer Class into the First Reader. Let us refuse to be scarred-up Christian Scientists. We do not have to be. Let us just be Christian Scientists who have learned our lessons and gone up higher.

Perhaps, however, that which most commonly keeps alive "the smell of fire" is self-pity. We feel so sorry for ourselves, forgetting that thereby we encourage others to feel sorry for us, since one seldom fails to receive that for which he makes a market. Jesus said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." When the "prince of this world" presents himself at the door of any human consciousness, he cannot effect an entrance unless there is something in that consciousness which responds. He may come over and over, but if he meets with no response he will soon get tired of coming. There is a limit to the length of time when even the most persistent falsity will continue to knock at a door resolutely closed and barred against it. Let us tire error out, instead of letting it tire us out.

As for the pity of others for us, there are few things more dully stupefying than sympathetic mesmerism. Human sympathy tends to strangle its victim in the python coil of what it impudently calls "love." Under its influence even that high and holy thing called "mother love" has sometimes been perverted into that which might better be termed "smother love." Yet one often unconsciously comes down under it because it assumes that phase of evil hardest to detect, namely, evil coming in the name of good, something which puts Christian Scientists off their guard more quickly than anything else in the world. Evil coming in the name of evil fights in the open. We see it in all its hideous proportions, recognize it for what it is, and govern ourselves accordingly; but evil coming in the name of good puts on the habiliments of heaven, presents itself to the guard in this stolen uniform, gives the countersign "love," and slips into the camp undetected.

One of the best antidotes for self-pity, should one ever find himself inclined to indulge in it, has been given by our revered Leader in "Miscellaneous Writings" (p. 18): "Thou shalt recognize thyself as God's spiritual child only, and the true man and true woman, the all-harmonious 'male and female' as of spiritual origin, God's reflection,—thus as children of one common Parent,— wherein and whereby Father, Mother, and child are the divine Principle and divine idea, even the divine 'Us'— one in good, and good in One." This inspired statement certainly strips off error's disguise in an instant, and leaves it cowering and ashamed before Truth; for if we once recognize ourselves in this our true identity and being, what is there left to pity or to be pitied? Is "God's spiritual child" ever an object of commiseration? Are we mortals or immortals? Of course we can think of ourselves as mortals if we choose. Nobody is going to stop us; indeed mortal mind would gladly encourage us in the delusion. Our false estimate of ourselves, however, and the world's false estimate of us can never for one instant change the forever fact that "now are we the sons of God."

There is something else, however, besides self-pity which helps to keep alive "the smell of fire," and that is self-condemnation. Either one alone is bad enough; but when they go hand in hand, as they so often do, one might as well step back into his fiery furnace and stay there a while longer; for his demonstration is not made. Does that sound discouraging? Perhaps, just at first; but when one is "speaking the truth in love," as the apostle so beautifully puts it, no one can feel really the worse for having heard it. Let us be awake to this fallacy of self-condemnation. Like its boon companion, it presupposes that evil has a history, and that we were identified with it. It tricks us first into admitting that there was a fiery furnace heated "seven times more than it was wont to be heated," for our especial benefit. This much conceded, it argues to us that we were once in it, and that we did get out of it finally, but not so quickly nor so gracefully nor so spectacularly as it now makes us believe we should have done, or as anybody else would have done under the same circumstances.

Let us refuse to accept any argument that perpetuates a belief in a material past. To hold a post-mortem over error is tacitly to admit that it once had life. Why not forget "those things which are behind," as the apostle says, and press forward? Let us shut the door on condemnation, both from within and from without. What other people say about our experience matters little, so long as God understands. Unless those who may now be criticizing stood right beside us in the furnace all through it, they are in no position to judge how hot the fire was.

What a wonderful thing it would be if every one who had ever passed through a trying ordeal would come out of it "every whit whole," with head erect and with shining eyes, with a greater love for God and man, a deeper gratitude, a stronger faith; and with a broader charity for the mistakes and struggles of the weak and weary ones of earth! What a goodly company they would make, these purified ones, as they go their silent way among us, peaceful, exalted, chastened, humble, their faces still radiant with the joy of demonstration!

Since our Leader tells us that "those only who are tried in the furnace reflect the image of their Father" ([Miscellaneous Writings, p. 278](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=those+only+who+are+tried+in+the+furnace+reflect+the+image+of+their+Father&book=tfccs.main.pw.misc)), should we ever look back upon any such experience with anything but gratitude? "Beloved," wrote the apostle Peter, from the depths of his own personal experience, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy ... for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

"The spirit of glory and of God"! To gain that, is it not worth a few pangs, or many pangs, if need be? Let us never forget that it was right there, in the midst of the fire, that those captives of long ago saw the vision of the Christ. Their human extremity was so great that they rose to a mental height born of the necessity of the moment, and beheld man as he really is, spiritual and not material, and beheld this saving fact so plainly that even the dull eyes of the watching Nebuchadnezzar caught the vision. "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" he cried in amazement; "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

That heavenly glimpse of divine reality, that clear realization of man as he really is, "the Son of God," is not so often gained in our hours of ease as in those testing times when the utmost efforts of animal magnetism seem put forth to destroy the Christ-idea for which we stand. So let us rejoice, even if it were through great tribulation that we gained the vision; for "the form of the fourth" once seen, can never be forgotten, nor can we ever go back to where we were before the wonder and the glory of it came. So the fire goes out, the princes, governors, captains, and counselors depart in baffled fury, Nebuchadnezzar openly proclaims that "there is no other God that can deliver after this sort," and those "upon whose bodies the fire had no power" quietly go about their business.

If the demonstration has been a perfect one, clean-cut, permanent, convincing, this is what he who has just been released will naturally say if questioned about his experience, and if he can say it in very truth and mean it, he may be absolutely sure that even "the smell of fire" is gone: "Was it hard? I don't know. The vision was so beautiful I have forgotten all the rest."