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Practitioner and Patient

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The beginner in Christian Science may find himself perplexed in his effort to understand the office of a practitioner. Former beliefs concerning the healing art and physicians provide no accurate basis for an estimation of the metaphysician and his work. Material medical theories and practices address themselves frankly to the prevention and cure of disease by means of matter. They take no thought for the mind, except as it relates to and is dependent on the body. Metaphysics, obedient to Jesus' command, takes no thought for the body, dealing rather with the mental states which cause disease, and appealing to the divine Mind for prevention and cure alike. *Materia medica* is avowedly unreligious, and its art requires no Christian qualification.

At the outset and in all their procedure the two systems diverge. The man of material medicine, content with the apparent restoration of the body to the normal, rests his case there; the one who heals through Mind, viewing the healing of the body as indicative of a mental change, pushes on toward reformation, that moral and spiritual regeneration without which there is no true metaphysical attainment. As the Christian Science practitioner does not, therefore, occupy a position analogous to that of the medical doctor, it may be helpful to the beginner in Science to have set forth, in part at least, the office of a practitioner, his relation to the patient, and *vice versa*.

In the sixteenth chapter of Acts there is recorded an incident in Paul's Christian practice. It reads: "A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Paul's response to the appeal was instant, for "assuredly gathering that the Lord had called," he went immediately and performed the office of helper, leaving the enduring record of Christian healing from sin, disease, and death. No less today the Macedonian cry comes up out of the confusion of human life,—

From our brother comes the wail
Give us light, our idols fail.

In Science every man can be his own physician, and his practice is the unremitting work of casting out of thought all that is unlike God, good. In general the need of assistance results from a state of confusion as to the great facts of being, their beneficence, ever-presence, and permanence, with a consequent inability to lay hold upon the healing power of Christ, Truth. Such a mesmeric state may be attended by great pain, or depression and distressing conditions of body, all calculated to unfit one for effective prayer in his own behalf. The necessity for breaking this mesmerism is apparent, and the cry for help is instinctive. Here may be recalled Mrs. Eddy's admonition in *Science and Health* (p. 420): "If students do not readily heal themselves, they should early call an experienced Christian Scientist to aid them. If they are unwilling to do this for themselves, they need only to know that error cannot produce this unnatural reluctance."

It cannot be too strongly pointed out that whereas the privilege and duty to seek a practitioner in time of need is clear, one should also know that no erroneous process of reasoning can induce one to turn over to another the work which rightly devolves upon one's self, thus shifting the responsibility to work out one's own salvation. There may be an occasion wherein the patient should relinquish his own effort, leaving the case entirely in the practitioner's hands, but as a rule the office of practitioner should be that of helper. Both practitioner and patient should work to know the truth, and to know the truth is a simple definition of a Christian Science treatment.

The bonds of Roman subjugation bore heavily upon the free-born Macedonian, even as carnal beliefs incapacitate and enslave free thought. But the attentive ear of a Paul is ever receptive to the call for help; his clarity of vision includes no such mesmeric beliefs as beset the patient. God does for man through man. The patient should be confident that there is a practitioner available who can meet his need. Indeed there is no case which cannot be met by some practitioner, and it is always possible to find that one. If a choice is made and there be no favorable results from the work done, the relationship of practitioner and patient thus established should not be made to continue arbitrarily. It is not always easy to lay down a rule; but in general, in the absence of complete healing, or at least distinct improvement, the practitioner may be courteously asked to yield the case to another; or the practitioner, under proper circumstances, may ask the patient to change. Failure of one or more practitioners is no basis for discouragement, for such failures only indicate the need for "patient continuance in well doing." There is a right treatment for every case, and God has not withheld either the truth or its manifestation.

The relationship of practitioner and patient being based on the mutual helpfulness of God's children, the interrelationship of Mind's ideas, there can be properly no restraint, no binding, no undue mental intrusion; not even the successful issue of a case can be made the basis for continuous or future relationship. Indeed the anticipation of a necessity for treatment is erroneous. Each call should be divinely directed. There is therefore no *rationale* for a permanent relationship of practitioner and patient, and no practitioner correctly thinks of any one as his patient unless that one be actually under treatment. The relationship ceases when the treatments cease, but may be renewed at any time by mutual consent. In the interim the terms "my practitioner" and "my patient" are manifestly out of keeping.

The practitioner seeks to cast out of his own thought and that of the patient all superstitious beliefs which might operate to establish a substitute for the family doctor or clergyman. He relies upon the wholesomeness of right thinking to correct the errors of belief. He makes no effort to concentrate his mind on that of the patient, but he does consecratedly seek to let that Mind be in him "which was also in Christ Jesus." The one and only Mind, being everywhere present, needs not to be concentrated. Practitioner and patient together humbly approach the throne of grace in confidence, never doubting. The practitioner in accepting a patient assumes full responsibility for the healing in so far as he himself is concerned. His first responsibility is to accept the patient only when, under wisdom, he recognizes his fitness to be healed, for, as our Leader says (Science and Health, p. 369), "no man is physically healed in wilful error or by it, any more than he is morally saved in or by sin." The patient should also assume the full responsibility on his own part. Each needs to be right without judgment of the other, and both are wholly responsible to God.

A not uncommon erroneous belief is that a certain practitioner is peculiarly successful in the treatment of a particular disease. That diseases are to be considered entities is repudiated even by certain schools of material medicine. Christian Science certainly gives no basis for specializing in the treatment of disease, unless indeed it be conceded, as Christian Science holds, that all diseases are reducible to this: a misconception as to health. Every Christian Scientist should be a "specialist" in reversing the lying belief of life in matter and revealing man's true status as a spiritual being.

It will thus be seen that the Christian Science practitioner is not, in the common usage of terms, a family physician, prescriptionist, specialist, mediator, pastor, or master. He is simply a servant of mankind, and his office may be fittingly termed a helper. His heart is open toward Macedonia, his ears are alert, and his footsteps are eagerly set thitherward. He receives his commission from the

master Metaphysician, Christ Jesus, and the apostle James thus voices its practical nature: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

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