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WISER THAN SERPENTS

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It may be said that much^{*} of the trouble in the world comes from failure to handle animal magnetism. Since it is the necessity of Christians to imitate the example of Christ Jesus, it follows that Christians have the inescapable duty of proving the unreality of the works of the devil. Now, the works of the devil, evil, may be said in a general way to be comprised in the supposititious activities of mortal mind. Only when the so-called human mind yields to divine wisdom, to the government of the one divine Mind, God, does it awaken from the mesmeric dream of evil thought^{**} and deeds. Christian Scientists, who are in a measure aroused from this hypnosis, are proportionately capable of overcoming evil in themselves and in others.

Animal magnetism is a name for evil in its false claim to be and to do something; it is the belief of evil in action. Wherever a falsity claims to be exerting itself to be and to do, there is animal magnetism. On page 594 of the Christian Science textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," Mrs. Eddy gives "animal magnetism" as a definition of "serpent."

The word "serpent" appears early in the Scriptures; and throughout both the Bible and Science and Health it is employed as the most^{***} adequate type of evil. From the statement regarding it in Genesis, it has stood for what Paul defined as the "deceivableness of unrighteousness."[†] "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made," we are told,^{††} and the Scriptural narrative presents the qualities of the serpent as subtlety, duplicity, venom, adroitness, cunning, charm, fear, hate, anger, the counterfeit of wisdom.

The serpent is represented as engendering fear. It claims to terrorize, fascinate, and kill. It is supposed to produce and transmit poison. Its entire activity claims to be destructive; and this characteristic remands it to the realm of the unreal, to the sphere of the nonexistent; for that which is destructive or destructible cannot really continue even to seem to exist,—it carries within itself the elements of oblivion.

The one quality ascribed to the serpent that would seem to have reality is wisdom. To be sure, adroitness and charm have also better meanings, and when, together with wisdom, they are considered spiritually, they are properly attributable to the serpent of God's creating, of which Mrs. Eddy writes in *Science and Health* (p. 515), "The serpent of God's creating is neither subtle nor poisonous, but is a wise idea, charming in its adroitness, for Love's ideas are subject to the Mind which forms them, —the power which changeth the serpent into a staff."

The use of the word "wisdom" as applied to the mortal mind sense of serpent is similar to Jesus' reference to the wisdom of this world. He said, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Here wisdom has more the qualities of prudence and discretion. Jesus commended these qualities, and said to his disciples, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

In "Miscellaneous Writings" (p. 210) Mrs. Eddy has amplified what the Master said at that time, by declaring that "the wisdom of a serpent is to hide itself." We are, then, to obey the injunction of the Master by hiding ourselves from error's inspection and action, which are always with intent to harm and destroy. Mrs. Eddy has also declared in her Message to The Mother Church for 1902(p.17), "It is wise to be willing to wait on God, and to be wiser than serpents." Since the serpent here is a synonym of all active evil or animal magnetism, we have need to be wiser than animal magnetism.

In the allegory of the garden of Eden, the serpent is represented as talking to Eve. Mrs. Eddy reminds us that there is no such thing in animal life as a talking snake. The talking serpent used Eve's tongue, for it had no ability to talk itself. Evil may even, fraudulently, take the livery of heaven. The serpent talked to Eve in terms of her own thinking and speech. Indeed, any evil belief comes to us in the guise of our own thought. It can come in no other way, since we see, feel, hear, touch, and taste only what we believe. Thus all these evil things depend for their seeming reality upon our acceptance of them at the behest of mortal mind.

Now the question arises, How can a talking serpent hide itself? Will not its speech inevitably betray it even if behind a camouflage of words? According to Paul, "the god of this world"—the devil, evil, animal magnetism, the original talking serpent—is "dishonesty, ...craftiness,...handling the word of God deceitfully." Beware the smooth talker, who hides behind the words of truth, the

lying maker of the venom of malice and mischief. There is little to choose between the venom producer and the venom vender, carrying and spreading the poison of gossip, scandal mongering, idle talk, malicious criticism.

"The wisdom of a serpent is to hide itself;" and because the serpents of error come to us in the guise of thought, and can come in no other way, therefore the serpent hides itself in our own thinking. We must seek for it there. The animal magnetism outside our own consciousness can never harm us. The wisdom of the serpent is to hide itself by masquerading as good, created reality. For this reason, the serpent is a type of hypocrisy "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness."

This animal element, which claims to be inherent in mortals, impels them to all evil in the name of good. Animal subtleties are deceived and deceiving, but to themselves alone. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." This simplicity in Christ, Truth, enables one to break the mesmeric charm of matter's seemingly pleasant aspects, and to antidote the hypnotic virus of matter's ugly phases.

In displaying its so-called wisdom, the serpent hides itself in the most effective place for hiding, namely, a hole. The superficial student hesitates or stops short at the hole of the serpent. He loves to think of God as Love, but he dislikes to stir up a nest of serpents. He will not handle animal magnetism. He either does not see the error or, seeing it, does not want to or will not deny it, reverse it, and reject it.

The true Scientist boldly turns the serpent out of its hole. He does this with the wisdom of God and not with his own human mentality, however. Thus he emulates our Leader's counsel and example to be "wiser than serpents." To be "wiser than serpents" is to employ the wisdom of God, the one divine Mind, in bringing the serpent out of its hiding place or hole, handling it, and taking away its sting. Thus handled, that is, reversed with Truth, the lie or serpent becomes a staff on which to lean. Note that to be wiser than a serpent is to employ the wisdom of God, not of one's self. No one can, of his own belief in mortal mind or will, uncover error. The true Scientist lets Truth uncover error.

The lie uncovered, the student should destroy it, but only by replacing it with the truth. All animal magnetism is a supposititious reversal of the divine activity of Christ, or Truth. As has been previously implied, the serpent, when reversed in Science, becomes a staff on which to lean. If we allow Truth to uncover error, we shall find the serpent replaced by a staff. We must be active in allowing Truth to uncover the lie; we must be insistent and persistent. God must do this; but we must see to it that we are witnesses to Truth's activity.

Jesus said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." May not this be taken to mean, I am not come to destroy reality, but to restore it to consciousness? If we handle the serpent of materialism with the wisdom of God, we shall realize, proportionately to our right activity, the allness of Spirit and spiritual things. Christian Science is not destructive, but restorative. Not even the serpent itself is lost in reversion, but it thus becomes a type of true wisdom.

All too often the hole of the asp is to be found in one's own bosom. Such a hiding place seems most immune from attack. People are usually more willing to invade the nest of error in another's thought and heart, and sometimes without the wisdom of God, than to dig out the nests of evil within their own thinking, a process which requires greatest courage. It is natural for a Christian Scientist to handle serpents. Jesus said of his disciples that they should do so unharmed; and a Christian Scientist who does not handle animal magnetism, and handle it with divine omnipotence, is not a genuine disciple of Christ or a worthy follower of his Leader. It is unnatural for a Christian Scientist to ignore the serpents or their hiding places. One should use discretion, and be sure of his ability to accomplish what he would do for Christ. How can one be sure of his ability, capacity, and competency? By preparedness. If the student does his daily work effectively against animal magnetism, he will find that the work on any specific case will become more and more incidental. He should remember that while the rattlesnake heralds his offensive, most serpents are quiet, striking without warning; hence the necessity to be impervious and immune to their poison. The antidote for all serpent bites is spiritual thinking and living; for spiritual sense alone can immunize against the mesmerism of the beliefs of matter.

To be "wiser than serpents" is also to be undeceived by hidden sin. Conversely, we should be wise as serpents in hiding our aims and plans from mortal mind. The serpent is wise enough to attempt to hide its venom, its presence and purpose. We should be wise to detect, attack, and destroy the serpent with its supposititious virus. We should cultivate perception, initiative, and spontaneity in handling evil. Our Leader tells us that the illusion of Moses regarding the serpent lost its power to alarm him when he reached out and conquered his fear.

In one of the pictures in "Christ and Christmas" Mrs. Eddy places the serpent behind the woman. Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." King Hezekiah sang, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Paul declared that he was intent upon "forgetting those things which are behind." A lie is never true; the unreal does not exist. Jesus knew this, and feared not animal magnetism; otherwise, he could not have put the serpent behind him. But note! Jesus commanded Satan, the lie, to get behind him. He handled the serpent of animal magnetism,—but as nothing, and with the power of Truth.

Nothing can substitute the Christ and spiritual consciousness. Beware the serpent of materialism hiding its purpose to destroy both individual lives and usefulness and the existence and usefulness of the movement of Christian Science by magnifying the supposititious material in the place of or in the guise of the spiritual. There is no kinship between the material and the spiritual. If we protect evil beliefs by our approval and indulgence, tacitly or openly, the consequent multiplication of the serpent's progeny will increase our pains and regrets. If we concede room to one devil, we may find seven others come to share its abode in our consciousness.

These serpents, or animal magnetism, are not people or things, even though mortal mind does claim to operate as mortal men and things. These serpents are, one and all, just false concepts,—material beliefs. The serpent we handle for ourselves we at the same time handle impersonally for others,—indeed for all mankind, —because Christ, Truth, which heals and saves anybody, truly heals and saves everybody. Can we not visualize that happy day when "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; ... and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den;" when "they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them"? And why? Because they shall be "wise as serpents," yea, they shall be "wiser than serpents." Then "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

* A change was made to this article in the 2007 printing of *Anthology of Classic Articles*: "much of the trouble in the world" was changed to "all of the trouble in the world".↑

** A change was made to this article in the 2007 printing of *Anthology of Classic Articles*: the word "thought" was changed to "thoughts".↑

*** A change was made to this article in the 2007 printing of *Anthology of Classic Articles*: the word "most" was omitted.↑

† A change was made to this article in the 2007 printing of *Anthology of Classic Articles*: the corresponding citation (II Thess. 2:10) was added.↑

†† A change was made to this article in the 2007 printing of *Anthology of Classic Articles*: the corresponding citation, Genesis 3:1, was noted.↑

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