

The Man Who Learned to be Kind

ONCE UPON A TIME, a very long time ago, there lived a cruel King, who was very tyrannical and wicked. He used to beat and torture his people and took their goods away by force, so that they had very little to eat. Soldiers guarded him day and night lest some of the people he had ill-treated should kill him.

One day the King died, but he did not go to Heaven. Instead he went to the Fairies' prison house. When he got there the Fairy chieftains had him brought before them bound hand and foot.

"You have been a cruel and wicked King," they said sternly. "You have ill-treated the people in your care. You have starved and beaten your people, and have been altogether selfish and greedy. Now it is necessary that you should know what it is to suffer."

Although the King was frightened and begged them not to do it, they locked him up in a small cell and gave him nothing but bread and water to live on. Whenever he screamed and shouted, his anger brought evil creatures into existence which were allowed to come into his cell. He was in great fear of these, and so it was a terrible punishment to him to have to endure their presence. He cried out in pain, and the Fairy chiefs who ruled in Fairyland said to him: "These creatures would not come near you if you had not ill-treated others. You made them with your bad thoughts. When you are really sorry and can promise never to do such things again, then we will let you out."

"Oh, but I am sorry," said the King.

"We don't think so," replied the Fairy chiefs. "At present you are not properly sorry—only frightened and angry."

"How shall I become sorry, O Fairies?" asked the King, finding that he could not pretend in Fairyland. (Remember that Fairyland is real, not a place where one can pretend, as many people think.)

"Every night when you are going to sleep you must think of your evil deeds and with them think of the pain you have suffered. Then you must try and put yourself in the place of those you wronged," said the Fairy chiefs. "Every morning when you wake you must say to yourself, 'Today I am going to be better and kinder.' This will make you better in time." With that the Fairy chiefs left him.

The King started to argue with them and was going to say something in an angry manner when the evil creatures again appeared. This so frightened him that he determined to try to do what the chiefs had told him. Every night he thought of his cruelties, and every morning he felt himself becoming sorrier, and said so to himself. In the end he grew really sorry for everything he had done and promised the Fairies he would never do such things again.

The chiefs of Fairyland, who could see he meant what he said this time, then let him out of prison and taught him how to be good. Every day he was given lessons to learn, until he was ready for another visit to earth and another chance to practice what he had learned. After a long time he came back to earth one day as a small baby in a humble home of very poor parents who had to struggle hard for their living. And they were by no means pleased to see him, as it meant one more mouth to feed.

His parents ill-treated him and made him do hard work without much to eat, until he finally became a man and could look after himself. He had forgotten the Fairies, the prison house, and his

lessons, but whenever he wanted to feel angry at the treatment his parents were giving him a Voice spoke inside him warning him that this was wrong. The same thing happened whenever he was about to be greedy or selfish. The Voice said it was wrong, although it did not tell him why.

The Voice spoke to him so often that he finally learned to be kind in spite of the things his parents did to him. The other people in the village were kind to him because he did things for them and helped them. Sometimes he gave up his own scanty food for others hungrier than himself, and the people of the village began to love him and brought their troubles to him. They gave him little presents of money and goods, and with these he purchased horses and cattle and many kinds of goods, and he grew rich in time.

Then he bought a big house, hired servants, and settled down to a life of ease. But the Voice would not let him rest. So strongly did it speak to him, unheard by others, that he began to give his wealth away again to the needy. Then the Voice left him alone; but whenever selfishness or greed came over him, then it rebuked him.

At last he gave his wealth away altogether and lived quietly, using his house and goods for those who were poor or sick. He gained a great name for goodness of heart, and all the country people for many miles round loved him, so much so that they named a village after him, and the King who ruled those parts did him honor. But he did not forget the Voice and went on doing good to everyone.

In the end the Voice changed inside him. It no longer spoke to him telling him he should not do wrong, for he had lost all wish to do wrong. The Voice then became a multitude of Fairy voices telling him of Fairyland and bringing back memories of his own life there. But they did not tell him of the prison house, because there was no need any more for that. Every night when he slept the Fairy voices led him into the dreamland which borders on the realm of the Fairies. He spent many happy hours there, helping to cure sick people, and as a reward being taught many things which may only be learned in Fairyland.

From that time on he who had once been a cruel King, hated, feared, and guarded by soldiers,

SONG FOR THE INANIMATE

For every lowly thing, and meek,
That has not yet the power
To praise God vocally, I speak
In its behalf this hour.

The flowing grace of animal,
The claw, the quivering ear,
Are in themselves antiphonal
Te Deums He can hear.

The tree and flower express their prayer;
The essence of their soul
Wafts up to Him on perfumed air
And fills all Heaven's bowl.

And mighty rivers! None can doubt
Their inner urgency;
They sing serenely, flowing out
To meet their destined sea.

And winds, and wheat fields, and the grass—
Their subtle songs of praise
Make music as the seasons pass
To glorify His days.

But muted ones I represent:
The crock, the stewing pan,
The humble rug that is content
To ease the feet of man.

The patient chair on which we sit,
The paper on the wall,
The candle that has not been lit—
Father, I speak for all.

Lord, hearken to our silent lyre,
Our wordless minstrelsy;
In praise of Thee we dare aspire
To serve humanity.

—Muriel Thurston

became a saint, loved by all men and calling no man his enemy. Think of him when unpleasant things are happening to you, and listen to your own Voice inside you. You have one too! □

—L. Furze Morrish