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Corroding Memories

1917

OUR GUARANTEE

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IT is not the smallest blessing of a good memory that it has an infinite capacity for forgetting things that are not worth memorizing. Some of the most loving souls in history have made conquest of the hearts of multitudes of men and women by the simple negation of failing to remember certain things. These are the people who forget "insults" and "injuries" very quickly and very completely, and with no less facility do they retain the most perfect recollection of the things that Love lives upon and delights to hold in constant companionship. The merest child knows all about this, and has its own experience of what it means in the cup of happiness.

The satisfaction one feels in the contemplation of pleasant memories does not need to be written about. We all know its potentiality for good, but have we yet sounded the depths of the folly of seeking to perpetuate those incidents and memories which continue to poison the wells of social intercourse in the world? What is the main cause of all misunderstanding and bitterness between men and communities of men but the disposition on the part of

so many to perpetuate rather than to cremate or decently bury their historic feuds? What man ever "got anywhere" in support of anything who went about the business wearing the damning frown of a long-cherished grudge?

John Ruskin said to a bosom friend: "There is no fault or folly of my life that does not rise up against me and take away my power of possession, of sight, of understanding; and there is no past effort, no gleam of rightness or good in it but is with me now to help me." In like manner, nations derive support and strength, or they court weakness and disaster according to the use they make of their past. For example: Where would the American Republic stand to-day if, instead of burying and forgetting them, the American people of a later generation had chosen to preserve in imperishable pickle the miserable details of those wrongs their ancestors suffered at the hands of the English government of the time of George III?

The American family history is no different from that of every other energetic group of mortals, in the sense that it has had its own representatives of that type of mind which is slow to forgive and forget a real or fancied wrong. It has been over-run with all sorts of irreconcilables and self-important vanities, men who will mutiny against every system of government, whose one law is "an eye for an eye." But what have these men produced that is flourishing to-day?

Positively nothing. While the country at times, especially in its great crises, has seemed to be hamstrung by the performances of these men, the *dominant note* has always been to do the right thing, to take the large view, the noble part with the Washingtons and Lincolns, rather than with the political Ahabs and Sinn Fein parochials.

* * *

Looking into our own family affairs at the present moment, what is the real cause of all this bad blood in Ireland and Quebec but the poison of festering memories?

* * *

That Ireland in the past has been more sinned against than sinning, the most sympathetic student of British history will freely admit, and if the French-speaking natives of Canada will insist on having been the victims of more than one real grievance, they are in a position to produce wagon loads of indisputable evidence in support of their case. But what of it? Just this, that if the erstwhile governors of Ireland and French-speaking Canada have blundered to the extent of crime against these people, will any one seriously maintain that the *dominant note* of the British people is or has been anything lower than to do not only the square thing, but the magnanimous thing by them and every shade of human interest British government touches?

* * *

Of all the futile employments on which it is possible for a man to dissipate his energies, that of nursing the memory of his meannesses is surely the most enervating and soul-killing. There isn't a country on the face of the earth that has not a record of accumulated infamy sufficient to sink the Ark of the Covenant itself if the past were to be judged solely on the evidence of its infamies. But the Court of Heaven doesn't judge men and nations on such "lop-sided testimony," and the courts of men are coming nearer and nearer to the standard of the High Court of Heaven every day.

* * *

Speaking of actual experience, we have found that ninety-nine per cent of our "grievances" were nothing but the black spotted curtain of our own atrabiliousness! That the greatest moments of our life have been those in which we knew that our estranged friend *saw* that we had forgotten the grudge we owed him and all of whatever had occasioned it. The Kingdom of Heaven is in every man if he will but let it speak, and it is the failure to realize this that accounts for all that we deplore to-day in "Quebec," "Sinn Fein" and *ourselves*.

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