

Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016

Volume 6 *A Collection of Essays Presented at
the Sixth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on
C.S. Lewis & Friends*

Article 12

5-29-2008

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Recommended Citation

Jordan, Pamela L. (2008) "A Redeemed Life: Edmund Pevensie as an Example of Lewis's 'new kind of man'," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016*: Vol. 6, Article 12.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol6/iss1/12

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A Redeemed Life: Edmund Pevensie as an Example of Lewis's 'new kind of man'

Pamela L. Jordan

A recurring theme in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is that Narnia changes those who enter. The narrator repeatedly notes the restorative power of Narnia and calls the reader's attention to the difference in the children (and adults in *The Magician's Nephew*) that results from spending time in the world Aslan sang into being. As Martha Sammons points out, "Every individual who enters Narnia is changed and develops qualities he never knew he had" (63). In Narnia we are more of who we can be; we realize our potential. This theme is expressed in each of the Pevensie children, but comes through most clearly in Edmund. His visit to Narnia and personal encounter with Aslan transform him. Thus, the Edmund we see in *Prince Caspian* is very different than the Edmund we meet in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

If we look closely at Edmund's behavior, we see him exhibit qualities not apparent before he entered Narnia. Furthermore, we see clear evidence that he realizes his potential. His story reflects C. S. Lewis's discussions of redemption in his apologetic writings. In fact, Lewis's characterization of Edmund illustrates the conception of redemption outlined in "Beyond Personality." This character is not just improved but in the process of becoming "a new kind of man," very much like the horse being turned "into a winged creature" (*Mere Christianity*, 182). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* we witness Edmund's redemption. In *Prince Caspian* we see the result of that redemption.

As *Prince Caspian* opens, evidence of Edmund's development is seen immediately. When the Pevensies feel themselves pulled on the train platform, it is Edmund who first declares, "This is magic I can tell by the feeling" (PC 3). Edmund's sensitivity to magic reflects the influence of his first visit to Narnia. Moreover, the sense of adventure he exhibits when they find themselves on an island denotes a change in his disposition. The first time he stepped through the wardrobe, "he did not much like" the place, but he embraces the return to Narnia with

excitement and eagerness to explore, likening their new adventure to being shipwrecked (he had read all the right books). Just as the debate about eating the sandwiches brings tempers to a boil, Edmund is able to diffuse the situation with his adventuresome spirit. "Look here," he says, "there's only one thing to be done. We must explore the wood. Hermits and Knights Errant and people like that always manage to live somehow if they're in the forest" (PC 9). His response indicates qualities of leadership. In the small details the narrator provides, the careful reader discovers numerous indicators that convey the differences in Edmund. For example, still in the opening pages of the book, we are told that Edmund and Peter "took it in turns to carry Peter's greatcoat." This suggests Edmund's willingness to share responsibility, a far cry from the Edmund who was more concerned about having something to eat than helping Mr. Tumnus. Exploring the ruins of Cair Paravel, Edmund again shows initiative and spunk and uncovers the door to the treasure chamber. Unlike the Edmund of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Edmund of *Prince Caspian* shows a willingness to listen and to be guided. When Peter proposes that they fit Trumpkin with armour from the treasure chamber, Edmund starts to ask what's the point, but as soon as Lucy suggests that they should do what Peter says, Edmund agrees thus acknowledging Peter's position as High King. It is Edmund who suggests that he draw swords with Trumpkin saying to Peter, "It will be more of a sucks for him if I win, and less of a let down for us if I fail" (PC 99). The statement implies a right estimate of himself—an awareness that results from coming face to face with Aslan. Also, unlike the Edmund of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Edmund of *Prince Caspian* shows a willingness to admit mistakes. After the group is attacked in the valley, Peter chides himself for leading them that way, but Trumpkin reminds him that the Glasswater route was Edmund's idea. Edmund is quick to admit that Trumpkin is right. This Edmund is an encourager who supports his brother's leadership. As they

embark on their expedition through the woods, Edmund speaks words of encouragement to Peter: "You've got that pocket compass of yours, . . . haven't you? Well then, we're as right as rain" (PC 114).

The strongest evidence of the change in Edmund is presented in a key episode which is central to the plot and theme of *Prince Caspian*: the appearance of Aslan to Lucy followed by the recognition of him by each of her siblings. The episode measures the faith and character of each of the Pevensies. In discussing the moral psychology in *The Chronicles*, David Downing observes that the crucible of character is in moral choices, "situations where the right decision is not the easiest or the safest one" (91). In contrast to the selfish and mean choices Edmund makes in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund makes unselfish and just choices in this situation. In chapter nine, "What Lucy Saw," the children and Trumpkin debate about whether to go up or down the gorge. Edmund, in a speech that reflects his redeemed character reasons: "Well, there's just this. . . . When we first discovered Narnia a year ago—or a thousand years ago, whichever it is—it was Lucy who discovered it first and none of us would believe her. I was the worst of the lot, I know. Yet she was right after all. Wouldn't it be fair to believe her this time? I vote for going up" (PC 123); which is, of course, the direction Aslan has indicated to Lucy. Here again we see an individual who admits his mistakes but also one who is fair-minded and generous. Throughout the episode, Edmund shows regard for Lucy's feelings and remains open-minded.

In all of the *Chronicles* faith determines how and when the characters see Aslan. The episode recorded in chapters nine through eleven of *Prince Caspian* presents the motif of a test of faith. At the close of chapter ten, Aslan tells Lucy to wake the others. When she does, it is Edmund who readily believes that Aslan is present. Though he questions why he can't see Aslan and even suggests that Lucy has experienced an optical illusion, he yet helps her wake the others and does not claim that she is mistaken. When Lucy declares that she must follow Aslan even if the others don't come with her, Edmund backs her up. "I'll go with her if she must go. She's been right before" (PC 142). Edmund's decision to take Lucy at her word is "a poignant example of spiritual healing" as Downing points out (104). His faith and trust illustrate Aslan's redemptive work. Thomas Williams, in his devotional guide entitled, *The Heart of the Chronicles of Narnia*, explains the significance of Edmund's behavior. "Edmund decides to believe Lucy's claim to see Aslan on the basis of her history

of truthfulness. But he does more than believe; he follows her even though he cannot see. Edmund does not merely have faith; he exercises faith" (144). The boy who asked if the white witch could turn Aslan into stone, now waits expectantly for a glimpse of the Great Lion. Significantly, Edmund is the next to see Aslan. At first he sees only shadows, but his faith makes Aslan more and more visible until he is the one who cries, "Oh, Aslan! . . . Peter, Peter. . . Did you see?" (PC 146). When they meet, Aslan acknowledges Edmund's faith most fittingly with the words, "Well done" (PC 148). The traitor has become the faithful servant.

Lewis says, "Redemption always improves people" (*Mere Christianity* 182). That's certainly true in Edmund's case, but even more so, his redemption leads to developing maturity. The spiritually mature Edmund we see in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* displays the qualities of compassion, honesty, and humility, most notably apparent when he patiently listens to Eustace's story about his undragoning without passing judgment and then graciously accepts Eustace's apology. Showing his capacity for compassion and mercy, he says to Eustace, "That's all right. . . . Between ourselves you haven't been as bad as I was on my first trip to Narnia. You were only an ass, but I was a traitor" (91). Edmund's behavior exemplifies Lewis's statement in *Miracles*, "the greater the sin, the greater the mercy" (127). It is evident that he deserves his title of King Edmund the Just. The mature Edmund is also able to confront wrong when he sees it. When Caspian announces his intention to go with Reepicheep to see the world's end, Edmund asserts his position as one of the ancient sovereigns of Narnia and firmly rebukes him, declaring, "I say you can not do this" (VDT 209). In this instance, Edmund displays the right use of authority and a clear sense of responsibility.

This picture of a redeemed Edmund certainly represents one who has reached his potential, but if we neglect to acknowledge the explanation for the transformation, we miss the point of *The Chronicles*. Edmund is redeemed because Aslan dies in his place; he is transformed because he spent time in Aslan's presence. The narrator's description of Edmund as he comes to deliver the challenge to Miraz makes this clear. "Aslan had breathed on him at their meeting and a kind of greatness hung about him" (PC 174). By its very nature, Narnia has a restorative power. In Edmund's case, it frees him to become his real self. Note the narrator's description after Edmund tastes Lucy's cordial in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*:

"When at last she was free to come back to Edmund she found him standing on his feet not only healed of his wounds but looking better than she had seen him look—oh for ages; in fact ever since his first term at that horrid school which is where he had begun to go wrong. He had become his real old self and could look you in the face" (LWW 177). Edmund's experience reflects Lewis's assertion in *Mere Christianity* that when we let Christ take over, we become more truly ourselves (182). Being with Aslan brings out the true Edmund. We see an illustration of this concept in the narrator's description of Edmund's fencing match with Trumpkin. "But the air of Narnia had been working on him ever since they arrived on the island, and his old battles came back to him, and his arms and fingers remembered their old skill. He was king Edmund once more" (PC 100).

In many ways, King Edmund seems like an entirely different person than Edmund Pevensie. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* adjectives like sulky, mean, spiteful, and treacherous are used to describe Edmund. Peter calls him a "poisonous little beast" (LWW 53), a title he certainly deserves. After he decides to let Lucy down and deny that he has seen Narnia, the narrator aptly summarizes his spiritual condition: "Edmund . . . was becoming a nastier person every minute" (41). Before his redemption, there's very little to like or admire about Edmund.

Walter Hooper wryly points out, "Most of the children are quite unattractive before they visit Narnia and they come back much improved. That is one of the reasons they are taken there" (85). This is obviously the case with Edmund. The boy who enters Narnia is mean, resentful, self-serving, and vengeful. The boy whose life has been redeemed by Aslan is brave, honest, unselfish and humble. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, he was capable of "one of the nastiest things in this story" (40). In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* he is the compassionate mentor for the unlovely Eustace who can humbly acknowledge that Aslan knows him. A transformation nothing short of remarkable. Narnia has enabled Edmund to realize his potential and become his true self, an example of Lewis's new man: "Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant" (187 *Mere Christianity*). Just how I imagine the look of Kind Edmund the Just.

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