

John Lawrence Sinton - Harrogate Summer School 1952

Editor's Note: Mr. John Lawrence Sinton was a founding member of Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist in Manchester, England. A Class-taught student of John Doorly's; he went on to become a Teacher himself, taking The Normal Class of 1937. After resigning from The Mother Church in 1946 he held summer schools in, Harrogate England, as well as coming to America, to conduct classes. In his book— "Harrogate Summer School 1952 — a Verbatim Report of Classes on The Glossary of 'Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures' by Mary Baker Eddy"—he takes up the subject of electricity—his remarks are repeated here.

Analysis of Electricity

On previous occasions I have discussed an aspect of metaphysics which, at the moment, I am only going to touch upon; that is to say, the transition between the claim of abstract evil, which is wholly mental, and its evolution into this subjective condition called matter. It is the phenomenon of electricity which bridges the apparent interval between the mental and the physical: Mrs. Eddy summarizes the whole process perfectly in the following reference.

UNITY or Good 35: 23-1. "A molecule, as matter, is not formed by Spirit; for Spirit is spiritual consciousness alone. Hence this spiritual consciousness can form nothing unlike itself Spirit, and Spirit is the only creator. The material atom is an outlined falsity of consciousness, which can gather additional evidence of consciousness and life only as it adds lie to lie." What is the nuclear physicist dealing with to-day in his manipulation of the material atom and its constituent particles? In Mrs. Eddy's day it was not yet realized that the atom could be further sub-divided into constituent particles, and what the physicist is doing to-day, whether he knows it or not, is just this: he is manipulating the infinitesimal falsities of mortal mind; he is manipulating primitive mortal mind in the domain that lies between abstract evil and its phenomenon or subjective condition called matter. This primitive mortal mind appears vividly real to his own physical senses, just as the destruction following an atomic explosion appears to be terrifyingly real to the physical senses; and yet the whole phenomenon is within mortal mind, and from the standpoint of Spirit is unreal and suppositional.

You remember the statement: "The good which the material senses see not is the only absolute good; the evil which these senses see not is the only absolute evil" (Mis. 299: 15-17). Such absolute or abstract evil evolves, through this process of adding lie to lie, a subjective condition, which appears to the physical senses of mortal mind as matter. Electricity,-the atom and its particles,-lies in that interval between abstract evil and phenomenal evil, and the physicist is manipulating the infinitesimal particles,

of abstract evil. If that process can be used as a servant to give us light and heat, to replace the toil of getting coal, and other hard physical labour, if it can be made to drive our ships, our locomotives, and our power stations, and if it can be used constructively in accord with Mrs. Eddy's statement that human invention must have its day, well and good. The evil of it is when it is inverted further to the destruction of human life and all the promise of good that human life holds. In one sense we are faced with a dilemma, in that abstract evil generates and constitutes its infinitesimals in the first place, and then at a much later stage of development it brings along what we call the human mind with its physical senses, which goes to work upon those same infinitesimals, and the process can easily become a round of evil. For if aggressive evil takes hold of that process and through avarice, greed, ambition, lust for power, seeks to dominate mankind, then we see how this same abstract evil becomes a self-consuming, self-destroying proposition. That is the situation in which we find ourselves to-day.

What is the way out? It is the Christian and scientific reduction of evil to its nothingness, whereby human thought is willing to lay off the claim of abstract evil, admit the fact of its ultimate nothingness, and set about the work of translating all these negative or inverted phenomena so that they eventually disappear in order to reappear within the reality of Spirit. That is an immense work before us all, but remember that it has been accomplished individually before, and that is the great comfort. A prophet such as Elijah, through spiritual sense alone, saw that it could be done to the point of final translation; he had no scientific language or equipment, he lived in a primitive age, but he proved that spiritual translation was a possibility. Jesus came along centuries later and proved it in full, by facing alone and fearlessly this whole argument of abstract evil in the form of the malice that would destroy him. Whereas Jesus faced this malice as an individual, to-day this same malice would destroy humanity, by perverting this development of nuclear physics as one of its means. So we see that no matter from what angle we regard the problem of evil, it is a self-destroying proposition. There is only one way out, the way of Spirit, of Christianity understood spiritually.

Let us go back to the statement: "The good which the material senses see not is the only absolute good; the evil which these senses see not is the only absolute evil." That "absolute evil" is the supposed inversion of the one indivisible Infinite. Through a process of adding lie to lie it claims to evolve a subjective condition of itself, which appears to its own organized physical senses as the phenomenon of matter. In ages gone by, the process of evolution whereby the abstract evolved into the sensible or phenomenal was not understood, and consequently there was a gap between one and the other. Jesus

understood it and demonstrated it, but he could not leave behind in his age a presentation of the process. Little by little it has become clear; Mrs. Eddy has filled in the apparent gulf between the mental and the physical, and has shown us that the phenomenon we call electricity is that which links the abstract evil unseen to the senses to the physical, which thereby becomes apparent to the organized physical senses of the human mind and body. Continuous research by the physicists and engineers has shown that matter is first of all reducible to molecule and atom, and out of this process of reduction has come forth the development of electricity and magnetism with their rightful and legitimate uses, one of which is to provide light and power. Then research has shown that the atom is divisible further into particles. It is still an open question whether the particle in its further analysis is corpuscular or whether it is in the nature of a wave motion or radiation. At any rate, whether one or the other, we are now dealing with such infinitesimals that they are wholly invisible to the human senses, even through the most powerful microscope.

So the conclusion is that the physicist is dealing with the infinitesimals of abstract evil which lie between the mental on the one hand, and the apparent or phenomenal on the other. In his research, the physicist is showing, whether he is aware of it or not, that matter is ultimately primitive mortal mind, and that what we call electricity is the bridge between abstract evil and the sensible evil we call matter—Mrs. Eddy terms it a "sharp surplus." It builds up by means of a process of adding lie to lie, and in this process of build-up it always reaches a stage of unbalance, when it can no longer sustain itself in a state of equilibrium, and the outcome is a thunderstorm, the snarl of the beast, the whirlwind that desolates the prairie, the tornado that sinks a ship. These are but the outcome of mortal mind's inability to sustain itself in a state of equilibrium.

SCIENCE AND HEALTH 293: 3-31. The whole answer to the question is provided in this passage from the textbook. "Electricity is not a vital fluid," —it is not something that runs along a wire, —"but the least material form of illusive consciousness" —that is what Mrs. Eddy calls elsewhere "abstract evil," and electricity is the least material form of it. Electricity is the first phase in the evolution of matter, but from the human standpoint it is the least material form of illusive consciousness. What, for example, is a more material form? Well, the human body, or this table. But electricity is the least material form; and the physicist in his laboratory is examining this form of illusive consciousness; he is examining the first phenomenal phase of abstract evil, which is invisible to his own senses even through an electron-microscope —an example of electricity employed to analyse electricity, like "the blind leading the blind."

The reference continues: "...the material mindlessness," —for electricity has no intelligence of its own, —"which forms no link between matter and Mind, and which destroys itself." But it is the link between abstract evil and the phenomenon matter, although it provides no link with the divine Mind. "Matter and mortal mind are but different strata of human belief." Now we go on to see electricity in relation to the human body. "The grosser substratum is named matter or body;" —that is a further degree of consolidation; —"the more ethereal is called mind." So that within the human organization we have the human mind, its consolidation which we call matter or physical structure, and in between the two the electrical phenomenon that physiologically is called nerve. Nerve today in physiology is being recognized as an electrical phenomenon; it is not something on the end of a little fibre, but the link between what we call the human mind and its body. I have seen that actually demonstrated. There is today an instrument which shows without any question that the nervous reactions throughout the human body are electrical phenomena which can be recorded graphically on a sheet of paper. Mrs. Eddy, who wrote on this subject of electricity fifty to seventy years before physiology developed the necessary equipment, was perfectly right; and only today is her statement being understood and demonstrated. "This so-called mind and body is the illusion called a mortal, a mind in matter. In reality and in Science, both strata, mortal mind and mortal body," —with electricity the link, —"are false representatives of man."

Now it becomes clear why "nerve" appears in the allegory in the chapter "Christian Science Practice," and why it is so important to know how to deal with it in the practice. Nerve is not only the source of pleasure and pain, but it is one of the fundamental constituents of the whole human organization, and not until we can bring it under the control of spiritual sense and power shall we have conscious control over our own bodies. We can see clearly today that as we gain control of nerve Christianly and scientifically, we have conscious control of the human system, and the human system will become as malleable in the hands of enlightened spiritual consciousness as clay in the hands of the potter. In the next paragraph Mrs. Eddy deals with electricity in relation to the natural world. Having first defined it in relation to the human body, she now defines it in relation to the natural world. "The material so-called gases and forces are counterfeits of the spiritual forces of divine Mind, whose potency is Truth, whose attraction is Love, whose adhesion and cohesion are Life, perpetuating the eternal facts of being." And here is our second definition: "Electricity is the sharp surplus of materiality which counterfeits the true essence of spirituality or truth,..." How do we arrive at this "sharp surplus"? The process is that which is set forth in Unity of Good 35: 26-3, the process of accretion, or adding lie to lie.

Mortal mind, being lawless and having no control of its own phenomena, always builds up to a surplus, and then expends in a deflation, whether it is the lightning flash, the storm at sea, or the snarl of the beast. Thus we see "the great difference ...that electricity is not intelligent, while spiritual truth is Mind." Now comes the third paragraph, which shows the whole position in its true light. "There is no vapid fury of mortal mind..." At first "vapid" appears to be out of place, because it means void, flat, deflated; but it simply shows that even the fury of the carnal mind at its height is still vapid. Jesus proved that when he said to the storm, "Peace, be still;" just as he said on another occasion to the serpent, "Get thee behind me." His power was such that he could cause animal magnetism to silence itself, to roll back, to dissolve. "There is no vapid fury of mortal mind expressed in earthquake, wind, wave, lightning, fire, bestial ferocity —and this so-called mind is self-destroyed." Read this paragraph in conjunction with our earlier reference in Unity of Good 52: 16-2. "The manifestations of evil, which counterfeit divine justice, are called in the Scriptures, 'The anger of the Lord.' In reality, they show the self-destruction of error or matter and point to matter's opposite, the strength and permanency of Spirit. Christian Science brings to light Truth and its supremacy, universal harmony, the entireness of God, good, and the nothingness of evil."

We now see how men who work in the field of atomic physics, because of the very circumstances under which they work, because of the very materials they are handling, —in other words, the infinitesimals of mortal mind, as it were mental dynamite, —can be subject to aggressive mental suggestion, or the whispering of the serpent from other quarters, and induced to betray themselves, their fellow men, and their country, through a process which, if not checked, will pull them down into the depths of depravity. In one sense these infinitesimals of abstract evil are the distilled essences of evil. Even in physical experience, these men who work in atomic plants have to be checked against taking radiation into the system, to protect them from poisoning of the most desolating kind. We see, therefore, that in atomic physics, considered metaphysically, we have the distilled essences of abstract evil. That is what we are dealing with. But remember the whole thing is a supposed something outside the infinitude of Spirit. What matters most is that, although we are examining this so-called inversion, we should never lose sight of the fact that we are doing it from within the infinitude of divine Principle, this One, All, and Only, this indivisible Infinite, within which we are held divinely, from which identity can never lapse, from which it can never be torn apart by a supposed second power. In other words, God's universe is as intact today at the point of perfection within the divine order as it was when "the morning stars sang

together." This is our comfort, and it is a scientific fact. All we are doing is to examine a supposed inversion in order to prove its nothingness. That is all there is to the problem of evil.

INTERVAL

Let us never lose sight of the fact that in our analysis of the supposed inversion of the one indivisible Infinite, the adorable One we call God, we are not engaged upon a warfare with a power that can overwhelm the Infinite; and with the growing consciousness of the oneness of being before us, we can be, and indeed are, fearless on this whole question and the analysis of it.

Someone has asked me a most pertinent question: In view of what we have said, is electricity noumenon or phenomenon? Well, it is both, according to one's point of view. From the standpoint of abstract evil unseen to the senses it is phenomenon; from the standpoint of human experience, as the power that generates the light and runs the factory, it is noumenon. It is causative when used rightly in human experience; but from the standpoint of abstract evil it is an effect. As the link bridging the interval between that which is wholly mental on the one hand, and the physical on the other, it is both cause and effect, according to one's point of view.

Remember, when we are handling the claim of pain electricity claims to operate through nerve to give us discord. So let us see that we are not identified with the pain, electricity, or nerve in any form or phase. The answer is that "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," and we are gathered and held within the infinitude of divine Love which is in, and through, and above, and below, even to "the joints and marrow." Let us have such an abiding consciousness of our whole being in divine Love and no other self-existence that we can just turn on the serpent of error and say: "Out with you; you are no part of me, you have no attachment, no lodgment; but conversely, my own joyous, illumined consciousness is a law of dismissal, a law of reversal, to that which would claim to have attachment or lodgment in me." Then with an uprising joy for these facts and their operation in consciousness, we shall find that they do give us conscious control of the human system; even electricity has no power to inculcate itself into our system, but we have and enjoy a complete immunity from it and complete control over it.

The nature of the claim may be anything. We took a hypothetical case this morning when we spoke of a drug addict. What is it that attaches certain power to the drug? Primitive evil. How does it operate?

When the drug is taken into the human system it claims first to stimulate pleasure, and then to react upon itself and produce hopeless depression. But what is the agent in the human system between the mentality and body? It is nerve, electricity. No matter what the stimulation of pleasure or pain through the drug or alcohol, scientific analysis discloses that the medium is electricity. Mrs. Eddy went so far in her day as to explain to her household —although she never put it into her books— that physical poisoning could be introduced into the human system which would have all the symptoms of arsenic or strychnine poisoning as the outcome of the claim or argument of electricity playing upon the nerves. Behind that, of course, would be just abstract evil operating as a law to destroy, to disintegrate; and under certain circumstances it could be used by a mental malpractitioner for the purpose of mental assassination, the verdict on which in the post mortem would possibly be some form of poisoning. In connection with this question of abstract evil, there is an interesting reference in the first chapter of John's Gospel, where we read: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (i: 29). In the original Greek, the word sin appears in the singular, not in the plural, and it is clear in the light of what we know that the term is deliberately used in the singular to denote the unconscious, involuntary, abstract concept of evil. Jesus came to destroy that completely, and thereby to show us the way out. In one of the earlier Gospels the record is that he came to destroy the "sins" of the world, which is a more objective sense denoting evil as phenomenon.

We need to watch that in laying bare this claim we do not allow it to build up a fear of a supposed power which can overwhelm the Infinite. The divine fact is, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." The Revelator's statement is absolute and final, the last word on the whole subject. When that proclamation is made, what is the response? A sevenfold uprising song of joy, praise, and deliverance. It was the consciousness of omnipotence which enabled the apostles to cause the prison doors to open at the midnight hour; it is the same power which causes the spurious effects of so-called malpractice to dissolve into vacuity. So let us see that we are dealing with a supposition, and the supposition only has power if we indulge it or believe it. If we will only keep ourselves poised and identified in the realm of the one Infinite as the sons of God, with divine Love in all, through all, over all, above all, constituting all the being there ever was or is or will be, then we can look into this supposition fearlessly and without hurt of any kind, without the smell of fire in our clothes, without an element of poison in the human system; we can do it fearlessly and with complete inunity, because that is our birthright...