

The dragnet

(*Matthew 13:47-50*)

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Everything that is gathered into the net represents all that comes into our thought and experience from the “sea” of “tempest-tossed human concepts” (S&H 536:6-7). We are bound to gather a mixture of impressions. Every day our net is full and inevitably contains all kinds of material. Some will be good, some bad. The good will be based on Truth, the bad will not. It is a wise practice — more than that, it is essential — at the end of each day and at the end of a particular phase of experience to go quietly over the impressions gained in order to gather what is good and to cast out the rest from consciousness, having learned from its lessons.

The angels represent the spiritual instincts and intuitions which guide us as to what is truly valuable and what is not, what is real substance and what is not, what is to be loved and what is to be dismissed. If at the end of the day or of some special experience we sit down to let these “angels” of Principle separate the positive qualities of that experience from the negative, and we make sure that we eliminate the negative through seeing that it has no reality and therefore could never have happened in reality, this habit will prove beneficial both to our peace of mind and also to the strengthening of our understanding of Science and its purposes. We must use the

ability which Science confers to magnify the goodness of the good by seeing the Principle it expresses and to diminish until nullified any suggestions of an opposite to good occurring during the day or in some phase of experience. We thereby reduce error to "its common denominator, nothingness" (S&H 540:9).

If we do this work properly and, instead of trying to retain everything indiscriminately and ruminating over it all, we see to it that we are left only with that which emanates from Principle and is therefore positive and good, then there is not even a vestige of the un-Principled to cause remorse or anger in ourselves. Consequently there is no "wailing and gnashing of teeth," but a happy and proper conclusion to each phase of experience. If we do not sit down and give ourselves time to do this, but rush ahead, we may let a confused sense of things linger in consciousness and possibly cause later disturbance.

Jesus was not merely calling for a casual review of impressions gained, but for the strength of scientific reasoning which makes a clear-cut distinction between that which is of Principle and that which is not and then gathers the good into vessels of consecration and discharges the other totally, relegating it to its own atmosphere of discontent and ultimate self-destruction, so that there is nothing left which "worketh or maketh a lie."

"The end of the world" does not refer to a distant day when we are all lined up before God. The "end of the world" which comes continually is the end of our trust in some aspect of the world as mortal mind presents it. We begin to see the hollowness of something which previously appeared safe and sound in our eyes, and as a result we begin to enter and enjoy the spiritual world which made its end inevitable.

What is it that impels "the end of the world" in some specific aspect? It is the fact of $2+2=4$ which impels the "end of the world" for $2+2=5$. And in the same way the initiative is always with our reflection of Principle, causing us to be unhappy with and spew out anything un-Principled. By obeying Principle, we hasten the day when we are finished with illusions. It is a "kingdom of heaven" or heavenly and satisfying experience to so recognize that which is true

that what is untrue drops out of our consciousness and experience.

The parable begins, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto . . ." It seems as if Jesus is showing how we can have a heavenly experience here and now, and if this is so, it is important to us. Mrs Eddy underlines this when she says, "Heaven represents harmony, and divine Science interprets the Principle of heavenly harmony. The great miracle, to human sense, is divine Love, and the grand necessity of existence is to gain the true idea of what constitutes the kingdom of heaven in man" (S&H 560:10-15).

The "wailing and gnashing of teeth" stands for the bitter disappointment which comes our way if we try to cling on to that which we know by spiritual instinct to be substanceless and unworthy of reliance. If we cling to the bad we do not find heaven, because the ideals we try to make our own are finite and not of the stuff of heaven.

It is animal magnetism which in belief makes anyone hold tight to what he really knows is not substance, hanging on to it time after time through stubbornness. Generally speaking, it is only stubbornness which keeps any of us out of the kingdom of heaven. Angelic intuitions do discriminate and distinguish for us; they tell even a burglar that he is doing wrong. Spiritual intuitions will always warn us, so no one has an excuse, but we may refuse to listen. If we adhere to the wrong — it is actually a case of allowing the wrong to adhere to us — we go down with what we have clung to, until we wake up. If we keep on the side of the angels, we have a heavenly experience all the time.

When the net is brought to shore, the good is gathered into vessels. This means that we should not deal casually with what is good in our experience. Even if we are picking blackberries, we do not let them slide through our fingers but put them in some container to make full use of them. And so we must gather good into vessels, or let it register spiritually. For instance, we should make a point of opening our eyes to the amount of reliability, punctuality, and decency which we experience in our contact with those whose service we count upon, noting also the part we ourselves play in all this by the amount

of our own service to Principle. Instead of passing carelessly over all the responsiveness, we should take it in and trace it back to Principle, so that it throws out for us any suggestions of "how unreliable people are these days" which may be brought forward in conversation. We should gather it into our vessels of Science until its implications become real for us. We then accept in practice that we live in Principle's world with Principle's expressions. We discard the assumptions of a deteriorating society which the world throws at us, and it is "the end of the world" for the false insinuations as far as we are concerned. Not only that, for our experience is happyfied by the continual discernment of good as illustrated in the response on all sides to the laws of decency and service.

We should never be perfunctory about the good we see and experience. Mrs Eddy spent a great deal of time gathering into the vessels of her publications all the good she had found. If she had not done this and if Jesus had not gathered into the vessels of his words all that he experienced, where would we be? So the individual should see to it that he allows good to make a definite impact on his consciousness in its spiritually scientific import.

The Master was not merely saying that it is advisable to let good register, but showing us something vitally important. He was illustrating one of the ways in which we enter the kingdom of heaven, or the realm of harmonious and purposeful consciousness, daily and hourly, until it becomes quite natural. If we look at anything — an individual, an animal, a bird, a landscape, a flower, or whatever it may be — and regard it as material, we are living in a material world with all its limitations, and a material world is a mortal world, subject to sin, disease, and death. If we see it as a symbol which speaks to us of something beyond itself and we value it as such, we are no longer bound by the surface showing of things. The symbol is not reality itself, but the language whereby we become aware of reality. Mind makes the reality, but men see that reality through symbols. If we constantly take the symbol back to its Principle and so come into closer communion with Principle, we are not living in a finite world, but living in and discovering more of the spiritual and immortal

world. Moreover, we shall come to the point where we no longer have to trace the symbol consciously back to its Principle, because the symbol will not be there as matter at all, but only as the presence of Principle, speaking of Principle. If we look through the symbol to become more conscious of what has sent it to us and we continue to do that, the symbol will finally disappear to us as a symbol, for we shall have grown beyond it.

To play superficially with symbols is an offence against Principle and can cause weeping and wailing for those who indulge in it, just as a child looking at its slate on which someone has wiped off a lovely picture may cry, because he feels he has lost the whole thing and through innocent ignorance believes the symbol on the slate to be all-important. Any symbol is inert in itself and has to be interpreted from Principle to be interpreted rightly. "Nature voices natural, spiritual law and divine Love, but human belief misinterprets nature" (S&H 240:1-2); "The divine Principle of the universe must interpret the universe" (S&H 272:28-29). If we see a beautiful flower and interpret it materially and admire it as matter, we know that it will soon be dead and this may cause us sadness. We have gained no idea from Principle because we have not allowed Principle to interpret the symbol. If on the other hand we let Principle interpret it as an idea of God in its "expression, form, outline, and color" (S&H 247:23-24), then when that flower passes out of apparent presence, we shall have gathered from its symbolic expression a lesson in spirituality which endures beyond the symbol and its expression.

When Jesus praised the beauty of the lily of the field as surpassing in its simple but profound magnificence the grandeur of Solomon in all his glory, he went on to stop men from staying with worship of the symbol and having inevitable sorrow, for he pointed out that the flower would be thrown away the next day, but immediately directed thought to the ever-present sustaining and providing Principle expressed symbolically in that lily of the field: "if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" This

is an illustration of taking the contents of the net and magnifying the spiritual quality of what is found within it and then engraving that on "the understanding and heart 'with the point of a diamond' and the pen of an angel" (S&H 521:16-17). It also illustrates clearly how to dispense with any argument that matter in any form whatever can be identified as real. The symbol (in this case the lily of the field) must therefore never be worshipped in its symbolic form, but valued only for what it reveals. In this process the symbol actually becomes more beautiful to us. We never lose anything by turning from the symbol to what it symbolizes of spiritual truth; "nothing is lost, and all is won, by a right estimate of what is real" (S&H 360:2-3).

If we look at a beautiful flower and ask ourselves what effect it is having on our thinking, the response shows us that it is not merely having a good effect but is also bringing us into contact with qualities which are spiritual in their nature, qualities which are registering on our thought and which may well remain with us if we entertain them fully and properly. In that manner the symbol — in this case the flower, which in its symbolic form is finite — will have registered with us in qualities and realizations which are infinite, and we shall have made proper use of that symbol and its purpose in developing our spiritual awarenesses and responses.

A symbol can and must in every instance be found to point to spiritual fact, whether that symbol appears to be *pro* or *con* — that is, good (as in the case of the lily of the field) or bad (as in the case of lightning, which in his statement, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" [Luke 10:18] Jesus used not as a symbol of destruction, but of the swift self-destruction and complete elimination of evil belief through the all-presence of good realized, which is "heaven"). Whichever way the symbol appears to us to point, it still symbolizes spiritual truths and must be seen to do so. If we have a beautiful symbol like a flower, we must not be caught out by deifying that beauty as physical. When on the other hand we have an ugly or negative symbol, we should not fear it or be repelled by it, but see through its negative symbolization to the positive. Once we begin to make a habit of rejecting and reversing the surface impressions of

sense testimony, it will become so instinctive and quick with us that it will constitute a natural healing process.

All symbols are dangerous if cognized only in their symbolic form. If they are beautiful symbols, they lull us. If they are ugly, we fear them or want to avoid them. But if in every case we see what is *symbolized*, we shall find, as Jesus did, "the unity and the reality of good, the unreality, the nothingness, of evil" (S&H 269:6-8).

We need the ability to translate that which appears to be evil into that which it must in reality be in its symbolic value, for the "greatest wrong is but a supposititious opposite of the highest right" (S&H 368:1-2). "When examined in the light of divine Science, mortals present more than is detected upon the surface, since inverted thoughts and erroneous beliefs must be counterfeits of Truth. Thought is borrowed from a higher source than matter, and by reversal, errors serve as waymarks to the one Mind, in which all error disappears in celestial Truth" (S&H 267:19-25).

For instance, we may say, "There's been a storm today," and if we just accept the storm as something which has happened, our observation of it has done no good at all. But if we immediately say, "There is no storm, because there is no resistance to Truth; the flow of Truth is unable to know or experience resistance," then we are on our way to learning how to attain that same Mind which was also in Christ Jesus when he said to the perturbed mentality at the back of the storm on the lake, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). He recognized that which claimed to be the cause of the storm — namely, the mental disturbance which his teaching aroused — and instantly realized that there could be no such disturbance. Since there is only one Mind, there can be no resistance to its ideas, for there *are* no other ideas. "All consciousness is Mind, and Mind is God" (Ret.56:18).

If we have this attitude of the Master in every situation, we shall see that all that the negative ever does is to illustrate its own powerlessness and thereby emphasize for us the positiveness of the positive and its power for good.

This parable, like all the others, was given for a purpose, but few

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people obey what it asks of them. At the end of a day they do not usually ask themselves, "What have I experienced or thought or seen?" and sit down to separate the good from the bad. But any individual who will do this daily or even hourly will make great strides towards that ideal mental stature in which good is enhanced until it takes on its pure spiritual quality and evil or error is dissipated into its nothingness. Quickness in this work leads to the instantaneity and unlaboured motions of the true consciousness of Mind which is man. And to discover this is indeed the kingdom of heaven.