

Putting in the sickle

(*Mark 4:26-29*)

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

At first sight it may seem that this parable merely embodies a piece of worldly wisdom; any active business man, for instance, would tell you not to neglect opportunities. But there are many things to which the business man is alert of which the Christian needs to remind himself. The Master knew that the trouble with the Christian is that his overriding guide is faith, faith in a higher Being outside himself, and this tends to dull his alertness to seize opportunities. So he used as an illustration the farmer who plays his part by preparing the ground and sowing the seed, and then his alertness makes him ready to use the sickle when the intelligence to which he has already responded in his preparatory work reveals to him the right moment for applying that sickle — at that point he does not hesitate.

A superstitious faith in Principle is almost worse than no faith at all, because if a man has no faith in Principle he will at least set about “clouting his own cloak,” and through that activity will become the servant of Principle without knowing it. On the other hand a superstitious faith in Principle which stays inert and merely waits for God to bring fulfilment (and in that very act is not waiting for God because God has no waiting in Him) stands every chance of losing the opportunity for good. Mrs Eddy makes the forthright statement, “No risk is so stupendous as to neglect opportunities which God

giveth" (Mis.213:10-11).

Jesus' attitude was defined in his statement, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." In that there was no superstition, "no weakness, no emasculation, no illusive vision, no dreamy absentness, no insubordination to the laws that be, no loss nor lack of what constitutes true manhood" (Mis.206:13-16). He knew that Principle always produces a perfect expression of itself — clear, specific, totally right for this instant — and this is Principle's work perfectly done; *his* work was to see that no argument of mortal mind was allowed to prevent that perfect expression of Principle from becoming manifest, first in his own thinking and then in the full coincidence of the divine with the human.

The Master, of all people, knew that the harvest is always at hand, but because men have to work their way through the human, he had to show the best paths and make plain that which would interfere and must be watched against. The aim was that men should take the straight line of Spirit through strong, clean admissions which counter the procrastinations and delays they are inclined to allow.

As Jesus watched the processes of nature around him, they illustrated unmistakably the persistent, patient purposefulness of good as it comes through to human apprehension. What men love is the breakthrough to "the full corn in the ear," but there would have been no such fulfilment without the continuous quiet development leading up to it. The farmer knows that he does not create the corn or its process of ripening, and men have to acknowledge that everything is in the hands of Principle and cannot be interfered with. We sometimes try to interfere, but it makes no difference to Principle and there is only "the smile of the Great Spirit" as Principle brushes aside our clumsy hand.

This parable shows that the only Mind there is is the divine Mind, outside the realm of what is termed the human mind. The proof of this lies in the fact that a sincere thinker is continually sowing seed in consciousness and continually experiencing that without any tending on his part the seed springs up; he becomes aware of the formation of ideas along the lines of his longing and seeking. "First the

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blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”

It is Mind alone that gives the seedlings of ideas which *we* feel as longings. Those seedlings have for us small beginnings, but they mature and come to full fruition without our influence. At that point it is vital that we put in the sickle and gather to ourselves those ideas of Mind. Only through this activity do we enjoy the experience called here “the kingdom of God.”

So many people let the moment of fruition drift by without “harvesting” it. The genuineness of their desire to learn of Truth leads to answers coming to them, but often the answers are treated too lightly and allowed to pass. Jacob in his sincerity wrestled until the ideas of perfection matured for him, but at that point he was wise enough to hold to them until they cleansed his mentality of all previous notions and brought him to the pure realization of his true identity. (See Genesis 32:24-30.)

If anyone longs to understand Principle, God, and lives continually with this longing, letting it unfold and lead him on, even while he lives his ordinary life, that longing is bound to come to fruition. It will not develop in a way which can be humanly arranged, but there will undoubtedly be illumination and revelation — in small beginnings, but gradually ripening — and it will be symbolized in his immediate experience. At that point he must not remain with the first pleasant or fruitful impressions of these ideas and rest content. He must set to work with the sickle and do the harvesting, or else the inspiration will be lost. Sometimes the fruit is so pleasant — in the form of healing or revelation — that he leans back, instead of going forward to the harvest. “Joy over good achievements and work well done should not be eclipsed by some lost opportunity, some imperative demand not yet met” (My.134:10-13). Spiritual ideas are given to man with one overall purpose — that he takes them and stays with them until they translate his consciousness into the levels and certainties for which they are the symbolic language.

It is a present necessity for a complete sense of manhood that we identify ourselves with the ideas of Mind which have unfolded to us, and thereby become conscious that we are part and parcel of the

divine Mind's reflection of itself. The Master knew that until a man identifies himself and his whole consciousness with the truths given him by divine Mind, he does not take on the character and expression of that Mind. Jesus "made himself the Son of God," the expression of God, by putting in the sickle and becoming conscious of that sonship. This brought him strength, power, and certainty, because it was *God* operating through him and *as* him. So we must use the sickle of our ability to understand. Mrs Eddy speaks in "Christ and Christmas" of "understanding, dearly sought, With fierce heart-beats."

Jesus had a wonderful birth through the virgin thought of Mary, but he did not leave it there. He must have asked himself, "Why did she conceive as she did? What enabled material so-called law to be set aside?" He wanted to see the Science behind it and he set to work to discover it. Answers came to him through individual revelation, through the Scriptures confirming such revelation, and through demonstration in his own experience. Then he gathered those ideas and saw that he must be about his Father's business. He did not let go the inspiration that had come to him, but acted on it, and consequently there was blessing for all mankind.

This parable tells in essence the life-story of Mrs Eddy too and of all sincerely longing thinkers. From her childhood Mrs Eddy yearned to understand Truth, and this seed was sown "in the soil of an 'honest and good heart' " (S&H 272:6). It unfolded and unfolded as she investigated one subject after another in her search for Truth. She realized through her experiences in homeopathy that the mental is the only healing factor, and she was led on and on until suddenly there was the momentous breakthrough from the human to the divine. All her longings and her unselfed desire to serve humanity burst into fruitage. She tells us that she caught a glimpse of the great fact of Life in and of Spirit, "this Life being the sole reality of existence" (Mis.24:17-18) and she was healed of an injury that had been pronounced fatal. But at this point of supreme illumination after all those years of living a life of human goodness, she thrust in the sickle and gathered from "the full corn in the ear" the Science at the back of it. She did not remain merely content with the healing.

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When the breakthrough came, she proved herself the seer for this age. She wanted to know what was behind all she had experienced and glimpsed. She writes, "I knew the Principle of all harmonious Mind-action to be God, and that cures were produced in primitive Christian healing by holy, uplifting faith; but I must know the Science of this healing, and I won my way to absolute conclusions through divine revelation, reason, and demonstration" (S&H 109:16-22). She gathered the purely spiritual ideas which had dawned on her, until they formulated themselves in scientific purposefulness and gave her the stability of absolute certainty. She experienced what is called here "the kingdom of God" when she did thrust in the sickle, because she says that her search was "sweet, calm, and buoyant with hope" (S&H 109:15-16). Later she wrote in "Science and Health": "Spirit, God, gathers unformed thoughts into their proper channels, and unfolds these thoughts, even as He opens the petals of a holy purpose in order that the purpose may appear" (S&H 506:18-21). In "Unity of Good" she speaks of applying "to the waiting grain the curving sickle of Mind's eternal circle" and of binding it "with bands of Soul" (Un.12:4-6).

So the main lesson of the parable is that when one is sincere about anything, the seedlings of thought and desire which were given by Principle will be impelled towards their full development by that very Principle. Then the warning the Master gives is that we must be ready to put in the sickle and gather the harvest — take the ideas to ourselves, identify ourselves with them, and fulfil their demands upon us in our daily living right where we are.

Much has been lost to history and to individuals through not putting in the sickle. Ideas are presented to someone and even when they take definite form for him, he still does not take them up and accept the responsibility of identifying himself with them in expression. People often say, "I wish I had done such-and-such. It came to me quite clearly that I should do it, but I didn't act on it." They did not put in the sickle. Frequently the idea grows to the point where it forms a complete picture of possibility, but through doubt, fear, or laziness they turn away and do not gather it and identify themselves

with it. So the parable is a warning against the loss of opportunities presented to us.

To take a simple human illustration: a couple have the desire to give a dinner-party and they go about their daily business, but that idea grows on them and at last takes shape. They decide that they would like to entertain certain friends up to a particular number and give them certain food, and so on. Everything becomes clear, but then so often they feel it is all too much bother and they turn aside. All those ideas that came to them are wasted, and instead of experiencing the joy of accomplishment, they omit to take the opportunity which was present.

Again, with a business you often see ideas flowing freely and brought to completion on the drawing board, but there is then a failure to clinch them in the commercial field, with the result that the ideas come to nothing in a practical sense. This would not happen if the people concerned alerted themselves to this habit of mortal mind and roused themselves to ensure that the ideas *were* brought to full fruition both for themselves and for the business. If anyone watches the process of success in business, he will note that the putting in of the sickle at the right time and with the clean cutting of true purposefulness has always taken place.

The moment an idea comes to maturity in our thought, the best course is to identify ourselves with it and follow it right through. If someone has a great and genuine desire to write a book, for instance, he will find that seed starting to sprout and leading him forward, and as soon as it bears fruit, it is up to him to use the sickle and not let the opportunity pass.

To those who have missed an opportunity and who have acknowledged this, the following words are not only encouraging, but also subjugate and dismiss any self-condemnation: "Tireless Being, patient of man's procrastination, affords him fresh opportunities every hour" (Hea.19:18-19).

So the rule is: when through a continual longing the way opens, we must grasp the opportunity and harvest the possibilities which are not of our own creating any more than was the original desire.