

The creditor and the two debtors

(*Luke 7:41-43*)

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”

This was the parable which Jesus told to Simon the Pharisee when he realized that Simon was thinking that he (Jesus) should have been aware that Mary Magdalene was a sinner. (See Luke 7:36-40.) The parable was directed specifically to Simon. There was no need to say anything to the Magdalene, no need for words to pass between them, for Jesus knew that he and Mary had met at the feet of divine Love, its ever-presence and its purpose for man. It was the Pharisee who needed help and so he told the story for him. He had no condemnation for Simon; he loved him as much as he loved Mary Magdalene, and the fact that Simon had invited him to be his guest indicated some recognition of the Christ, although in a superficial way which hid indifference to its real purpose. But Jesus knew that Simon was made of the same stuff as Mary and only needed rousing to this fact; there was love there, but it had to be deepened. So his aim was to bring home to him the awful sin of shallowness, a gliding over the surface of materiality, receiving some present but inevitably only temporary support from it. He was showing him that any individual loves Truth more if he has seen the worthlessness and vanity of the mortal dream and has nothing left *but* Truth than if he is satisfied in materiality and has little practical regard for Truth in his consciousness and life.

If we read Mrs Eddy's article "Pond and Purpose" and study what she says about the first and second baptisms (Mis.203:19—205:12), we realize that Mary had passed through the conditions outlined in the first baptism and reached beyond it to a gratitude untainted by anything from the past as she came to the feet of the man who personified for her all that she now felt as to the nothingness of sin and the wonderful allness of good. The costly oil with which she bathed his feet signified the wealth of gratitude based on reality, the true Science of being, which was now hers.

Mary Magdalene had broken through all the barriers of convention and come to the feet of the Master. After she had washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair in true humility, she anointed them with costly oil. The sequence given in the Bible indicates the movements of her realization: first of all the joyful washing away of all the past, then the wiping of his feet with her hair in pure recognition of the ideal for which he stood and the footsteps this revealed to her in following his path, and then the anointing with the oil of absolute consecration to this vision, the oil of gladness continually enjoyed by Jesus. The costly oil was the best material contribution she could make, her tears were her spiritual contribution. They were tears of overwhelming gratitude for a cleansing from all belief in sin, so that it was left behind entirely. She saw her true self in what she saw of Jesus and because she moved towards this ideal in unadulterated adoration and affection, everything else about her lost all entity and passed out of existence. This is the only true meaning of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is nothing to do with Principle, but with the individual winning his own pardon through looking at himself with Principle's eyes. It is never to do with the size or the amount of error involved, but always with the size and sincerity of the individual's awakening to the presence and attractiveness of good. It does not matter how good or how bad we feel we have been in the past, for the one important factor is how true to us at this moment are the truths of the perfection of Principle and idea. The real issue is never the amount of error we may have indulged in. The harlotry to which the Magdalen had been

subject was irrelevant to Jesus. Her thoroughness in that sphere probably defined the coming thoroughness of her devotion to the spiritual. Matter never counts in its goodness or its badness. The great Master said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing," and he could have added, "Either way, for good or for ill." He was not concerned with the dimensions of the two debts in the parable, but with the dimensions of the realization of Truth and of its importance and presence. In the case of Mary Magdalene there was a pure and personal impact, possessing her whole being. In the case of Simon there was the acknowledgment of Truth, but only as an interesting subject "over there," making no impact on his individual consciousness and rousing no desire to respond to what it meant.

We would surely do well to ask ourselves: Would I have broken through the barriers of convention and material conservatism, the barriers of "What will they think of me for doing this? Will I look ridiculous?" We could go further and ask: Do I allow myself to be heedless of the fact that I am debarred from the highest and best by mortal reasoning and arguments of every kind? Do I prostrate myself in thought before the magnificence of good as illustrated in this man Jesus and as illustrated everywhere and in everything for him who will approach it in this way? How much am I willing to spend all that I have on the costly oil of awakened consecration? How often do I shed tears, tears of the recognition of error but with a flood-tide of Love washing it away as ever having had reality at all?

These are the things which Jesus in his love for Simon was driving home in the endeavour to arouse him. He even pointed out the shallowness of his love as symbolized by his neglecting to provide water for the washing of his guest's feet, a custom which was a sign of courtesy and respect.

The importance which Mrs Eddy attached to this parable and the incident which called it forth is shown in the pages she devotes to it at the beginning of the chapter "Christian Science Practice" in "Science and Health." She underlines that importance with these words: "Here is suggested a solemn question, a question indicated by one of the needs of this age. Do Christian Scientists seek Truth as

Simon sought the Saviour, through material conservatism and for personal homage? Jesus told Simon that such seekers as he gave small reward in return for the spiritual purgation which came through the Messiah. If Christian Scientists are like Simon, then it must be said of them also that they *love* little. On the other hand, do they show their regard for Truth, or Christ, by their genuine repentance, by their broken hearts, expressed by meekness and human affection, as did this woman? If so, then it may be said of them, as Jesus said of the unwelcome visitor, that they indeed love much, because much is forgiven them" (S&H 364:16-31).

Does this story imply that a man needs to be bad before he can be thoroughly good? The answer must be: Of course not. We have only to think of two individuals in relation to their experience with Jesus. One was this Mary, who had come from the depths of sordidness and left it all behind with the immense joy and tear-filled gratitude for the presence of reality which she found in the Master. The other was the beloved John, a young pure-minded student who had been a fisherman and who adored the Master with the same depth and thoroughness as the Magdalen. In both cases it was their depth and genuineness which counted. It is a tremendous thing to realize that matter does not matter. Here were two human characters starting at apparently opposite ends of the stick, but both responding to the same character-reality and at the end of the line both at the same point. Each was last at the cross, first at the sepulchre. Each had come to that point through the same qualities — unselfed devotion, thoroughness, love, and a continual plunging beneath the material surface of things to find the spiritual cause (see S&H 313:23-26). So there is no need to think that we must experience error in order to find the reality of Truth, but there is every need to know that error does not count at all in its claims to presence, whether large or small. The one crucial factor is what we are made of — the spiritual substance which we are all bound to find and which therefore he who is really alert will devote himself to finding as soon as possible.

The size of the sin is not important, but rather the degree of abandonment of all belief in it through acceptance of the all-presence

of good. This should be heartening to the student, for it clearly shows him the way and in which directions his self-examination should be conducted. As he pursues this and realizes the wonderfulness and naturalness of good and its presence, and as this stirs in him a devotion equal to his realization and a total repudiation of all other suggestions, he will actually be finding *himself* as he thus finds his God. This same young student John tells us: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." The Magdalen had glimpsed this appearance of Him through its expression in the Master and in so doing much had been forgiven her, not as sin which having been real had to go, but as a realization that that error had never existed, never happened, never been. Hence the heartfelt relief in the flood of tears and the washing of the feet of him who stood on that spiritual foundation and walked steadily in the path which it marked out.

In the opening pages of the chapter "Christian Science Practice" Mrs Eddy implies that the winning of his own pardon in this way by the individual leaves him standing in his own freedom in the realm of the spiritual and real in a manner which enables him to find that same realm in everyone else's life-expression. This causes him to be a Christian Science practitioner in the truest sense.

Principle never forgives anything, knowing nothing to forgive, but the Christ Mind in us does "frankly forgive" our debts; it shows us that there is nothing wrong (and what else is forgiveness?) whether we love, but love little, because we choose to stay on the surface of life, or whether we love more, because we choose to penetrate that surface to what lies behind it and therefore love the impelling Principle. There is nothing wrong with the degrees of good chosen by the individual, but there is often much lost if that degree is only mediocre. As Browning put it: "Oh, the little more, and how much it is! And the little less, and what worlds away!"

Simon may have taken a personal interest in the person of Jesus as a fine young man both in stature and bearing, and the notoriety surrounding him may have attracted his attention and made him pleased

to have him as his guest, but Mary felt and let her whole past selfhood disappear into its native nothingness as she became possessed by what she had found — namely, the character, the Christ Mind, which *caused* that stature and bearing. It was this, the true Christ Jesus, which drew her with the strength of its calling. It was this which she adored and accepted as her pattern for life. It made her feel wanted and enabled her to leave the old Mary and accept the real Mary, the only Mary. It was as if he was moving towards her as much as she was moving towards him, for thus always he proved himself the real friend of mankind. There was nothing wrong with Simon's attitude as far as it went, but it was a vulnerable position. When Jesus had left, Simon might have encountered the argument that he was a trouble-maker and this might have inclined him to modify or give up his impression of a good man; whereas if he had glimpsed what *made* that good man and had responded as Mary did to a spiritual presence, then he could never have renounced that point of view.

And so it is with everything. There is nothing wrong with rejoicing in healing, for instance, but there is a higher rejoicing, which is necessary if we are to make the healing safe and sure, and that is to realize the truth that that healing was never actually required, for to Principle and therefore to us as its expression there can never have occurred a position or experience which needed healing. In this way we avoid the mistake referred to in the statement, "If we are ungrateful for Life, Truth, and Love, and yet return thanks to God for all blessings, we are insincere and incur the sharp censure our Master pronounces on hypocrites" (S&H 3:27-30); in other words, we should of course be grateful for the blessing itself, but then place our gratitude where it belongs — with the divine Principle whose processes have brought about the blessing. Wherever we are, we are still only "on the stairs which lead up to spiritual love" (Ret.76:14-15). We have not arrived at the ultimate, but Jesus is showing that we are a little nearer that ultimate when we go beyond the initial surface impressions. There is nothing wrong if a man says, "What a beautiful flower that is!" — in fact, his affirmation brings him joy and even healing — but there is something nearer right if he adds, "Doesn't that flower

point to the presence of the spiritual Principle which evolves everything according to its own perfection and is unerring in every detail of its manifestation?" He is still dependent on the symbol to see the spiritual fact, but he is utilizing that symbol in a higher way than he who enjoys the surface impression of the flower and yet may soon find his joy turned to sadness because it fades and dies. Beauty is real, but its realness lies beyond the first impression, in art and in everything.

In the reference to one debt being of five hundred pence and the other fifty pence Jesus was differentiating between on the one hand accepting the testimony of the five physical senses at its face value and on the other hand utilizing a higher sense of the spiritual activity symbolized by those senses. This higher, deeper sense is brought to light as we *see* not just the good and beautiful on the surface, but past it to what caused it; as we *hear* the words of Truth not casually, but beyond them to the Soul-consciousness from which they radiate, as Jesus' words radiated from the Soul-consciousness which possessed him and were met and fully accepted by the Soul-consciousness of Mary; as we *feel* not just sympathy, but feel through that sympathy to the spiritual facts which eliminate any suggestion of anything to be sympathetic about; as we *taste* not just the pleasures of human living but the lasting flavour and satisfaction of using the teachings of the Master in daily life to "taste and see that the Lord is good;" as we *smell* not a great many rats in the corners of human experience but the sweet aroma of Spirit's onliness. It is this activity which causes us to love much and truly and deeply, rather than just having an affection for surface impressions.

And so it is wise to take this parable to heart, to contrast the two characters Simon the Pharisee and Mary Magdalene and remember that Jesus saw that Simon was made of the same stuff as Mary and only needed rousing to that fact. The superficial is never satisfying to man. It is good to apply the stirrings and the rebuke to the Simon in ourselves, to the shallowness of our responses to Truth, but above all to feel the cleansing magnificence of what we truly are and throw our whole selves into the scale with Truth.