

The true ploughman

(*Luke 9:62*)

“And Jesus said . . . , No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” In this brief verse, with its vivid parabolic illustration, Jesus gives a clear indication of how to ensure a direct path and speedy progress in Science, through facing up to the subtleties of the arguments of mortal mind.

The preceding verses relate a series of encounters with three individuals; each encounter concerns following the Master. The first man came himself to Jesus and said, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest”. Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head”. There is no let-up for the Son of man, on a continual course “outward bound”. No periods of inaction are available to such an outlook. “The song of Christian Science is, ‘Work—work—work—watch and pray’ ” (*Message 1900, 2:7-8*); it requires constant alertness. Jesus was pointing out that the Son of man is engaged in the strenuous journey of finding how to experience his true being as the Son of God, and therefore following the Master could not be regarded as anything but a vigorous forward movement, leading to wonderful possibilities whose very nature could never be attained through any form of ease or sensualism. In business, sport, and in fact in every activity in which man is involved it is in the areas where difficulties have been faced up to and overcome that he has found his true and heavenly reward — the kingdom of heaven.

So with this first individual Jesus showed the path to be a straightforward and direct one, going ahead continually in response to spiritual leadings, never even having the opportunity to remain static

THE TRUE PLOUGHMAN

and evade the challenges presented by errors of belief.

Jesus now said to another man, "Follow me", but here the response was, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father". Jesus answered, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God". He knew that one of the strongest temptations, especially to an earnest student, is to indulge in the habit of looking back to find causes for the error which has apparently obtained in his own performance or experience, or in that of others or even of the world in general. Such a habit is something like resurrecting débris in order to try to bury it! This subtle claim is and must be unscientific, because it enhances rather than diminishes error, by giving it a cause, a father, and it does not bear good fruit in thought and life.

Mrs Eddy writes, "If you believe in and practise wrong knowingly, you can at once change your course and do right" (S&H 253:18-19). In doing this no one needs to stay back with the wrong course and examine it minutely under a microscope; he is best advised to see at once its total unreality and recognize that its claim to existence at any time is not valid in Science.

Jesus shows that the Scientist's work, instead of making a reality of error, even if he feels that the error lay in the past, is to "preach the kingdom of God" — that is, declare Truth now and here to himself and others. No one really preaches effectually unless he lives today what he declares of the divine presence and power, and he cannot do that if he is always trying to get rid of some past mistake or identify its so-called cause. These words from Hebrews have the same theme: "let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works".

When Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2), his message was, in effect, "Don't look back any more. The error never had any real existence in Truth, so if you try to cling to it as true, it will only continue to hold you in bondage in mind and therefore in body. Rejoice that it never had entity and not only that you are the son of God now, but also that you have never fallen from that status. That is the truth which makes you free".

Before he healed the man born blind, Jesus rebuked his disciples for this very error of looking for a cause or father for the problem. They asked, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus' answer was emphatic: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him", and he went on to heal the man of the whole belief that he had been born blind, so that he "came seeing". Jesus could be likened to an expert ploughman cleaving one straight furrow under Principle's direction. His words reveal that to him the error was never there, for as far as he was concerned the only thing present was Principle and its idea, God and His perfect expression of Himself, named man.

Mrs Eddy wrote: "Christian Science is absolute; it is neither behind the point of perfection nor advancing towards it; it is at this point and must be practised therefrom. Unless you fully perceive that you are the child of God, hence perfect, you have no Principle to demonstrate and no rule for its demonstration. By this I do not mean that mortals are the children of God,—far from it. In practising Christian Science you must state its Principle correctly, or you forfeit your ability to demonstrate it" (My. 242:5-14).

A third individual then came to Jesus and said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house". Jesus' reply here was, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God". The Master was laying bare another temptation which may assail the student—the conviction that he must not only bury with full ceremony the so-called cause of the apparent faults in his life, but also hold back in order to bid detailed farewell to all the types of thinking which he has previously dwelt with in his home, his consciousness. The argument that this is a right procedure may try to recommend itself as sound, sincere reasoning, but Jesus dismissed it, since it must mean thought being immersed in egotistical self-analysis and putting off again and again the moment of being fully awake and open to the path of good immediately in front of it. The path is certainly straight and narrow, directly ahead, and narrow in the sense that the indi-

THE TRUE PLOUGHMAN

vidual is closely listening to and following Principle and its mandates, as well as experiencing its joys and certainties. But if anyone is taking this path, he simply has no time to spend on minute self-improvement, which is actually an acknowledgment of imperfection as having had reality at some time and so is inadmissible in Science. "Mortals are not fallen children of God. They never had a perfect state of being, which may subsequently be regained . . . Mortality is finally swallowed up in immortality" (S&H 476:13-15, 17-18).

Looking back to misconceptions and mistakes, therefore, however subtly attractive to human earnestness, Jesus condemned. He even said that anyone who has set his hand to the plough, the plough of Science and the furrow it forms of consecrated conscious thinking based on Principle and its perfection, allowing nothing else to control it — anyone who has put his hand to this plough but then looks back in the manner described is not fit for or able to enjoy the kingdom of God. That kingdom is heaven, harmony, and harmony includes no element inharmonious or condemnatory in the least degree.

The Master is uncovering habits of thought which would dissuade the individual from focusing thought and endeavour on that which lies in front of him. When someone sets his hand to the plough of Science and follows it as it turns up the soil of goodness in man — making that soil ready for the further sowing of the spiritual realizations of perfection which the great Sower is always disseminating — he has to be awake to the temptations and tendencies which would interfere with the direct line of accomplishment.

Human thought may cry out at the dynamic demand of Principle revealed here by Jesus, but human thought can never, under whatever guise, make real or possible in the realm of Science any form of error which requires improvement out of itself. Instant dismissal of it as real, and dismissal also of everything to do with the past, is essential for advancement in Science. If error ever had a cause, then it would be real. And if error could be improved out of itself to make truth, then again it would be real; and once it is granted reality, no one can make it unreal with any finality. Heaven under this régime would become impossible of attainment; the best we could ever hope for

would be an eternity of improvements, never reaching our goal, and that is the ultimate slavery exacted by mortal mind's outlook.

So if suggestions come forward of any error which one has practised and the need to look for the cause of such error, one's only answer should be, "It never took place in Science. I therefore will not give it any reality in my thinking". If the suggestion comes that humanly there is a great deal at home in one's consciousness to which one has to say farewell, again the demand of Principle is to reply, "There is no improving process to perfection. Perfection is present, or there is no Principle and no Science". Let the student dwell with that perfection and let it fill thought to the elimination of all else and it will be found that the other fades out of experience in the face of the growing realization that perfection is natural and here and constitutes his true self; and he finds that true self in the ratio that he sticks to the straight following of the plough in the furrow of human realization. "Hold thought steadfastly to the enduring, the good, and the true, and you will bring these into your experience proportionably to their occupancy of your thoughts" (S&H 261:4-7).

The very endeavour to excuse ourselves from the utter devotion revealed in Jesus' simple words, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" shows that it is error. It sometimes whispers with the same Satanic voicing as was illustrated in Genesis when the so-called serpent of the subtleties of mortal mind whispered, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" and followed with the Satanic reasoning that it is necessary to know evil as something that has existed or does exist in order to handle it. These words of Mrs Eddy should prove thoroughly arresting to the student: "God never said that man would become better by learning to distinguish evil from good,—but the contrary, that by this knowledge, by man's first disobedience, came 'death into the world, and all our woe'" (Un. 14:27-2). Surely it is wise to ponder such statements, of which of course there are many more.

Most human beings are prone to look back to something in the past — to their childhood, to the "good old days" or "the bad old days", or to some period of their so-called history — and the more they do

THE TRUE PLOUGHMAN

so the more real becomes mortal existence. As Mrs Eddy says, "It is well to know, dear reader, that our material, mortal history is but the record of dreams, not of man's real existence, and the dream has no place in the Science of being" (Ret. 21:13-15). The question which concerns us today is not "Was I living rightly yesterday, or years ago?" The only question which counts at this moment is: "Am I living the life that approaches the supreme good?" (S&H 496:10). Am I determined to be a ploughman with my eyes and all my mental muscular ability devoted to keeping behind that plough, following its direction in an untrammelled consecration which will not be diverted from that one purpose, no matter who or what is suggesting otherwise?