

The ambitious guest

(Luke 14:7-11)

“And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Jesus was at a meal in the house of one of the chief Pharisees, and when he saw the guests manoeuvring for the best seats, he told them this parable. What he was pointing out to us all was that egotism will put any man in a wrong position in relation to everyone else, whereas a right estimate of himself and all others as expressions of Principle will bring out harmony.

If ever a man feels superior to others and that at the feast of Love he is more entitled than they are to receive from Principle because of his spiritual qualifications, this very attitude will “demote” him, since he has exalted self and has a wrong concept of Principle. Principle can only endow all its ideas with perfection and could not make some ideas superior to others. What else *could* emanate from Principle except perfection without exception? All ideas of Principle are equal in perfection, though each is distinct and different from all the rest. If we ever forget that all Principle’s ideas are of the same quality of perfection, we are put down, not by Principle or by others, but by our

own lack of understanding of Principle.

It is a law that in order to enter heaven a man has to take in with him everyone who comes within the radius of his cognizance. Heaven is harmony, and it is impossible for any individual to experience the heaven of harmony as long as he has thoughts about anyone else as inferior. There is no harmony in music if even one instrument in an orchestra is playing out of tune.

A man fully committed to an ideal finds without effort that all others so committed brother him, and the strains of inequality and competition become obliterated by the common enthusiasm for the shared ideal. If our ideal is divine Principle and its All-in-allness, we have the same experience.

On a worldly basis people do push themselves to the top table, but no man can push himself to the fore in the realm of Science; as soon as he thinks he is better than someone else, he has lost Principle. There is no Science if anyone could destroy or disturb the nature of Principle or its pre-eminent position.

It is no good going to a talk on Christian Science, for instance, with a poor opinion of ourselves, feeling that we cannot understand anything; if we hold that opinion, we are ignoring the fact that we are Principle's idea. But it is equally fruitless to push ourselves in front of the rest in our own mind and think to ourselves, as we look at all the others, that we know far more than they do, have more experience than they have, have demonstrated more than they have, and can therefore understand what is being presented much better than they can. If we are glad to have a loving and proper estimate of everyone present as expressing Principle, each in his unique individual way, we are in the right frame of mind. Moreover, if we have that Principled concept of everyone, we are bound to be drawn up into a higher position, bound to be lifted to a higher plane of spirituality and happiness.

If we move our egotistical sense of ourselves down into the "lowest room" of a true humility, we do not lose our true selfhood as Principle's expression of itself, but at the same time we accept that this truth must obtain for all others as well. From this higher under-

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standing our previous false estimates are displaced and we move into areas where we meet those whom we may once have thought of as inferior because of their lack of intellectual capacity, but whom we now acknowledge to be as much expressive of Principle as we are and who consequently bring us inspiration. Which of us has not from the mouths of babes or youth or unpretentious down-to-earth individuals learnt great truths of clear simplicity which have reached beyond intellectual reasoning and have elevated us to “the highest room” of reality at the feast of real truth based on real Principle? And which of us has not also had it revealed that something which we previously endowed with importance was merely what Paul called “a tinkling cymbal”? It has been exposed as hollow in comparison with reality, although embellished with a fair outward show.

Therefore the rule is that we should hold a proper and balanced opinion of ourselves as the expression of Principle — and such an estimate glorifies Principle because it can be arrived at only by seeing that Principle produces and maintains perfection — but at the same time we should not become unbalanced by thinking of our expression of Principle as better than that of others. Any such estimate pulls us down because it is a denial of Principle. If we are humble before Principle and its greatness and perfection, we shall never overstep the mark and try to step into Principle’s shoes (from which position we can only topple over), but will allow Principle to do all the governing and see to all the placing.

Whenever we hold a due opinion of ourselves as Principle’s idea, and we hold a similar concept of all others, an atmosphere is created of Love reflected in love and this is radiated back to us. There is then nothing to obstruct our being rightly placed by Principle in relation to everyone else. This applies very much in the business world, in professional spheres, and of course in the domestic field and family life. If we have a sense of others as ignorant and inferior, they feel this and it causes resistance; consequently they may not want, for instance, to hear what we have to say, in which case it is our own attitude that has obstructed Principle’s placing.

The “best place” is where God is. When we realize this, we give

up struggling towards perfection or pushing for a better place, and instead become conscious of Principle's presence. Then we know that we are in the best possible place and in the best possible relationship to everyone.

On one occasion James and John came to Jesus and made this request: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." Jesus said in his reply, "to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." (See Mark 10:35-45.) The placing of man is the prerogative of Principle. Only Principle can know the whole picture. Each note in the harmony of Principle has its vital place and part, no matter whether *we* believe it great or small.

Personality is push. The claim of personality is what causes someone to push himself to the forefront of the picture. But personality is also persecution. If a man expresses Principle clearly and then attributes that expression to himself as a person, he persecutes himself because he is indulging a mistaken concept and therefore to harbour it is bound to persecute him. Jesus continually turned thought from personality to Principle's presence. He asked, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." And so instead of having the burden which personality brings, he was able to say, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." When anyone is lost to himself as a person, he finds himself as Principle's presence and the whole heaven of Principle's harmony is open to him.

Mrs Eddy makes a statement which spells out a truth perhaps hard to explain humanly, but which anyone can find from experience and practice to be true: "One can never go up, until one has gone down in his own esteem" (Mis.356:24-25) — gone down from an egotistical sense. When through suffering or Science our "own esteem" goes, Principle's own esteem and certainty becomes our inspired experience.

The state of true humility is the most desirable and beneficial for the individual, but it cannot be attained by will-power, by wishing, or by a poor estimate of oneself. It can be attained only by an increasing sense of the magnificence and reality of that Being whom men call God and a subsequent appreciation of all the expressions of that

Being, called man and the universe. In developing this appreciation the individual attains to a humility exalted above all human definitions, and thus and thus only he walks in heaven — in a realization that he is in the presence of God and is part and parcel of that presence. This is the Science of true humility, and in practising it we know that it is true, for there is no other way to be truly exalted at the same time as truly humble.

If we take a straight look at the Master, we see that his absolute consecration and devotion to the allness of his Father or Principle gave him a proper estimate of his own value and the value of all others, even down to a sparrow and the lily of the field.

The feast of Love is immense, and the only way we can appropriately partake of it is to go into the “lowest room” of a true humility. At the feast of Love we are standing before Science for Science’s sake, and it is our attitude which counts — whether we are self-satisfied or even partly so (and therefore not fully interested), or completely empty vessels with a great longing.

If we have an inflated opinion of ourselves and perhaps go so far as to exalt ourselves before Principle, there are bound to be individuals “more honourable” than we are because there are many who *have* learnt the wisdom of humility. So if at the wedding feast of Principle we are self-satisfied with the little we know, it will not be long before we find that someone else has a truer concept of Science and then envy will set in and unseat us. If we go down to the “lowest room” at the feast of Love, it will not be long before we are exalted to feel Principle’s friendship in the ideas which come to us, not from an egotistical selfhood, but from that emptied selfhood being filled with a flow of ideas from Principle itself. “Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.” We shall be respected because the ideas that have come to us are not ours personally, but have the ring of Principle and have come because we have emptied out all that we thought was ours. We shall be honoured for what we have awakened in others of their true selfhood. Jesus said, “If I honour myself, my honour is nothing; it is my Father that honoureth me.” He felt this honour because he genuinely meant what

he said when he declared, "I can of mine own self do nothing [note the word "nothing"] ... the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works."

If we imbibe the spirit at the back of the Beatitudes, we see that they all emphasize the same sense of true humility: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "they that mourn," "the meek," "they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness," "the merciful" (any man is naturally merciful if he has no exaggerated notions about himself), "the pure in heart" (those who have just one affection, one longing), "the peacemakers" (anyone who sits at the feet of Principle is at peace and finds peace expressed everywhere).

In Science it is the mood that matters, and when Jesus recommended sitting down in the "lowest room," he indicated the mood of true humility which opens the flood-gates of heaven and exalts us to the highest position, whence fresh revelation unfolds. "When divine Love gains admittance to a humble heart, that individual ascends the scale of miracles and meets the warmest wish of men and angels" (My.188:31-1).

Jesus did not use the symbol of a wedding casually in any of the parables. So it is as if he is showing us here that in our relationship to others we are continually "bidden to a wedding," that is, to the opportunity to realize that we are actually present at the wedding of Principle to its idea as revealed in others by word and deed whenever we open our eyes to see this — through having the same attitude of expectancy and joy as we would naturally have as a wedding guest.

The truth is that Principle is forever celebrating the wedding of itself to its idea, its man and its universe. If we admit this, and approach life in that spirit, we shall not only experience it in measures which will help us to accept that we are always a guest at this true and only wedding; we shall also find ourselves spontaneously related to all other individuals and to every avenue of conscious experience in a manner which can be defined as true humility — that is, seeing the good in others and thereby seeing and feeling the good in ourselves and above all recognizing the naturalness of good itself, the Principle which has bidden us to its presence through its own ex-

pression, man and the universe. Jesus perpetually knew and felt himself a guest at this wonderful wedding of Principle to its idea. His absolute conviction that this wedding is all that is ever going on and is all that we have to learn and appreciate as true enabled him to reject every attempt to dissuade him from this truth and gave him the means of healing and helping others; and in so doing he established the completeness of his own wedding to the Principle he called Father.

Say every morning was a wedding morning and we awoke to hear the invitation to be a guest and then, waking fully, we determined that it would be so and that nothing would mar the atmosphere of expectancy and happiness always attendant on such occasions — this would cause us to fulfil without effort the conditions set out by Jesus in this parable.

In Science we are never bidden to a lecture on how to be good, but continually invited to attend the experience of Principle showing us that it is wedded to all its ideas. It is recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of John that two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus and when he saw this, he asked them what they wanted, and they asked him in reply, "where dwellest thou?" His response was, "Come and see." We are told that they "came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day." After they had dwelt a short while in the atmosphere or consciousness in which he lived and moved and had his being, one of them became his disciple, and this is how it should be with us, dwelling in an atmosphere where our state of thought is forever discovering through affection the presence of God in others and in everything. By so doing we shall naturally become attractive to others, even as we have become attracted to Principle through being aware of its expression of itself everywhere. We can be attractive to others only in the exact ratio that we allow Principle to be attractive to us in a full admission of its presence in all others in the special way in which they reflect that presence.