

The rich man and the beggar

(*Luke 16:19-31*)

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

The man who gave this parable knew that there is no death. He had demonstrated this in many instances by bringing individuals out of the belief of death. As Mrs Eddy says, he “accepted the one fact

whereby alone the rule of Life can be demonstrated, — namely, that there is no death” (Un.55:1-3). His promise to us is definite and dynamic: “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” We may then ask ourselves why he gave this very parable, which on a first reading seems to imply that the transition called death is an actual happening. When we examine the story, however, we see that the rich man and the poor man, whom Jesus used to illustrate the points he wished to bring out, are still in a state of conscious existence and still expressing their individual way of thinking, although they have moved themselves to a new area of consciousness. We have to remember that the Master knew also that there was no process towards supply, as his words bear witness: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” He demonstrated his understanding of this in the immediate availability of food necessary to feed the four thousand and the five thousand and also in such instances as the immediate availability of money to pay the tax when he sent Peter to collect it from the fish’s mouth. But this same man, knowing where others stood with regard to this understanding and realizing their entrenched belief in processes, gave the parable of the sower to make clear to anyone who does believe in these processes how to conduct himself through them in order to arrive at the same conclusion. Similarly, in this parable of Dives and Lazarus, he is showing what is necessary if someone does believe in the death process — that is, if he believes that we truly pass out of this existence into another. The truth is that it is impossible to pass out of consciousness. We are always conscious, that state of being is us, and it will never be moved from its purposefulness and wonderfulness as our only being. We go to sleep at night and we wake in the morning and through the whole of that period we have been conscious, fully conscious and fully operative; how else would our body have responded in its normal functioning?

In the story the poor man enjoyed a sense of relief on finding that he had not died, and consequently was inspired by the realization that he was and never had been dependent on matter and material con-

ditions for life and happiness. But after the first joyful relief given by these angel thoughts he had to establish the truth of their message through developing his scientific understanding; he had to go to the very bosom or central point of the Abraham experience. Jesus used Abraham in his story as a symbol acceptable to his hearers of a realization of the prime importance of the spiritual. Such a realization exposes reliance on matter as the basic error of mortal thought and the only producer of suffering. Abraham had recognized that material so-called substance could give him nothing, but he then had to turn his back on Ur of the Chaldees, the city which symbolized this, and seek "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" — that is, the spiritual understanding at the back of his revelation that only the spiritual is of value and has any creative power.

The poor man's path was easier than the rich man's because as Mrs Eddy puts it, "Better the suffering which awakens mortal mind from its fleshly dream, than the false pleasures which tend to perpetuate this dream" (S&H 196:6-8). Matter had never been a prop to Lazarus' sense of life; his problem had lain rather in the belief that a lack of matter made him justifiably sore with envy and caused his grievous sufferings. Now he stood in a position where all this had dropped away from him, but his first glimpse of the truth had to be made his own, as all glimpses of Truth have to be; for instance, when Mrs Eddy was led to that wonderful glimpse of ultimate Truth which raised her from suffering to the realization of "Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole reality of existence" (Mis.24:17-18), she knew that she had to go away and find the Science at the back of it so that the glimpse would never be lost; and she tells us that she spent three years in doing this. Jesus is making the same point here in relation to Lazarus.

On the other side of the picture, and with a "great gulf" between him and Lazarus from the standpoint of understanding, we have the rich man. Having worshipped matter as his god and the source of his so-called bliss and now tormented by realizing its utter uselessness, he saw that to remedy this very nakedness he had first to admit that

the Abraham way was the only way and the only escape from his mental torture — hence his request that Lazarus should leave Abraham's bosom to cool his tongue; but he was not prepared to take any action himself, seeking refuge in the vain hope that a mere admission of the value of the spiritual, although accompanied by a tenacious clinging to his old illusions, would bring some release from his pain of mind. The intensity of his acknowledgment of his mistake caused him to wish that those on earth indulging in sensuality as he had done should be warned against falling into the agony of his present position; his five brethren symbolized the sensuality based on accepting the testimony of the five senses. But Jesus makes the point that the individual can only learn his lesson from his own individual experience, and so if here on earth people take no notice of all the teachings and illustrations given them in the Scriptures of the fact that materiality and matter can do nothing for man and therefore do not exist, no other message or example will help them unless their own progress causes them to want to listen.

The Master was also dealing in this parable with the claims of spiritualism, one of which is that enlightenment can be gained on earth from those who have passed on to another experience. He first makes it plain that no communication can exist between opposite states of belief, just as someone in what we call a sleeping state cannot communicate with someone in what we call a waking state, and then shows that even if such intercourse were possible, it would bring no illumination to earth and make no impression on those buried in sensuality. Mrs Eddy states, "All that are called 'communications from spirits,' lie within the realm of mortal thought on this present plane of existence, and are the antipodes of Christian Science; the immortal and mortal are as direct opposites as light and darkness" (Mis.34:23-27). Jesus is also pointing out that here where we are we have all that we need to convince us if we are ready to be convinced — the persistent, scientific teaching based on the experience of individuals (represented here by Moses and the prophets) who proved to a large extent what they later put into words.

If we concede that our friends are in another state of consciousness

and yet claim that we can become cognizant of them through one or other of the senses, such as hearing, then logically we would have to go on to admit that we *could* become conscious of them through *all* the senses, since it is admitted that all the five senses combined are the means of mortal cognizance — and that would mean that they had not passed on to another state of consciousness. So any speculation based on superstition and mere theory can do nothing but confuse us and has no more substance than a house built of blocks of ice cream, which may be a temporary plaything but will finally melt. Any theory built on belief in the illusion called death can only dissolve before the inescapable fact of Life's allness.

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Those who believe in death and start their speculations on this basis, however much they claim that their thinking is directed in a spiritual manner, have made the prime mistake of admitting the reality of death, therefore their very materiality, although possibly cloaked in an effort at spirituality, produces a gulf between them and those who no longer make that mistake and who are either here in this existence or still as alive as ever in another existence. The "great gulf" is between those who believe in matter, including its final mandate of death, and those who have seen the nothingness of its claim to existence and power and have demonstrated this truth to themselves to some extent. The fundamental error is the belief in matter, which culminates in belief in the inevitability of death — that which can never take place in the realm of reality and is solely a phenomenon of mortal imagination.

The lessons which Jesus' hearers may have thought of as taking place in that fantasy world called "after death" were nothing more and nothing less than the lessons which anyone and everyone has to learn *here*, namely, that matter cannot give us anything because it does not exist, nor can it take from us anything, again because it does not exist; therefore belief in it as abundance or riches or belief in it as lack or poverty can and must be overcome in man's present experience. In any case it has to be resolved in the experience of the individual, whether he undertakes it now or puts it off in the hope that

in some mysterious way through that which never happens — death — it will resolve itself more easily. Jesus makes clear that it will not resolve itself more easily through that channel and that whether here or so-called hereafter the challenge is always *here* as regards the individual; it is something he has to meet in order to enter the true understanding of what he is and what he is made of.

Man has never for a moment ceased to be God's expression. Anything else is a dream. We may watch someone having a horrible dream and see his whole face twitching in agony, or we may watch someone having a pleasant dream and see a blissful smile as he stays in that dream as long as he can, but in both instances the individual is in dreamland, whether it is a case of suffering in dreamland or pleasure in dreamland. "Entirely separate from the belief and dream of material living, is the Life divine" (S&H 14:25-26), and what we all have to do is to wake from that dream of material living to find the Life divine which is already ours to enjoy.

The parable points out that even if we believe that death does take place, the less reliance we put on matter now the less we shall believe in it all along the line and the more quickly we shall be helped to accept the position in which we shall find ourselves, where through a growing disbelief in matter as a factor in our real life we see more and more the necessity of finding what the only important factor is, as Abraham did when he left Ur of the Chaldees and "looked for a city [a line of reasoning and revelation] which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Conversely, Jesus was making clear that the more we indulge belief in matter's so-called substance and capacity to confer health, happiness, and security, the harder it will be for us to climb out of those beliefs, as the rich man found. Jesus was saying, in other words, "Rid yourself now of your belief in matter as substance, cause, or reality, and this will open for you the path which leads in the right direction, just as Abraham had to leave Ur of the Chaldees in order to find the true city of consciousness."

So this parable was given by the Master to show us how to deal with the belief of death if we do accept it, just as he gave the parable

of the sower to show us how to arrive at the harvest if we believe that there is a process which we have to go through in order to have it. In that parable he made quite plain the best course to take and here he does the same; in this case it is to shed as far as possible belief in matter in every shape and form as necessary for our well-being. Thereby we shall be mentally fitted, as the poor man was, to carry the realization of this truth into the realm of scientific understanding as to why it is so, for our understanding of the spiritual Science at the back of these truths will make them real to us and therefore to our experience — and as with Abraham this understanding can come to us right here. The lesson thus is plain: we should start now to accept that “one fact whereby alone the rule of Life can be demonstrated, — namely, that there is no death” and get on with learning the rule of Life here. This rule is that life is wholly spiritual and is made up of spiritual realizations and convictions and that matter has no part to play other than to prove to us its own insubstantiality. If we obey that rule here and now, then if through our ignorance we do experience that which Mrs Eddy describes as “the transitional stage in human experience called death” (S&H 572.23-24), it will serve only to convince us of the rightness of the way we have taken. This is the way which is available to us here and now, as it was to Abraham without his having to die and as it was seen and experienced by the beloved disciple John, who beheld “a new heaven and a new earth” while on our plane of existence.

We must realize that even though in our present stage of understanding we may believe that death takes place, we shall all find that it does not; and so although we may not feel able to understand this truth fully now, it is a wise man who goes ahead with the development of those spiritual qualities which, being entirely separate from matter, can never even be touched by belief in death. If the Scriptural statement is true, “In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be,” it must also be true that if we will equip ourselves with an absolute disbelief in matter and a growing certainty and understanding of Spirit and spirituality, then when we wake from the belief of death to find that we have not died, we shall be well furnished to proceed

along the path which this discovery will make clear. We shall be conscious that we have many things yet to understand and accept, but at least are on the right track, learning that we are immortal and how to be what we are.

Therefore this story given us by the Master is as heartening and instructive as the story of the sower and the seed, and if we take it in that light it has the same wonderful lessons. Jesus was the great Wayshower, and our best course is to accept the way he showed, for through doing this we shall grow to the joyful realization implied in those words of his: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." "Life is deathless. Life is the origin and ultimate of man, never attainable through death, but gained by walking in the pathway of Truth both before and after that which is called death" (S&H 487:3-6).

Mrs Eddy shows the immense present benefits which result from facing the issue squarely: "If the belief in death were obliterated, and the understanding obtained that there is no death, this would be a 'tree of life,' known by its fruits. Man should renew his energies and endeavors, and see the folly of hypocrisy, while also learning the necessity of working out his own salvation. When it is learned that disease cannot destroy life, and that mortals are not saved from sin or sickness by death, this understanding will quicken into newness of life. It will master either a desire to die or a dread of the grave, and thus destroy the great fear that besets mortal existence" (S&H 426: 11-22).

Once we have based thought on the fact that there is no death, it leads to an entirely new way of looking at the problems and sorrows which arise through belief in death. For example, if we wish to experience no gulf between ourselves and our friends from whom we feel separated through our ignorant belief in that which we term death, we have only to admit that every relationship in our life has come about through the operation of Principle demonstrating unity and harmony in character-expression. Therefore all our closest and best companionships have been part and parcel of Principle's reflection of itself. This being so, they cannot be interrupted or interfered

with, but must forever continue and forever unfold Principle's purpose for them. The unity and the purposeful development are perpetual, for they are a necessity of Mind's manifestation of intelligence. "What God hath joined together," no man *can* "put asunder." God never joined together two material bodies. Principle could only join together one of its ways of expressing itself with another of its ways of expressing itself, and the interweave is sustained and maintained by that very Principle.

These close relationships, which mortal thinking attaches to our earth-experience alone, never had anything to do with the physical, even when they seemed to have on superficial evidence. We have to lift ourselves out of the belief that we ever saw the true selfhood of each other with physical eyes, ever heard it with physical ears, ever touched it with physical hands. When we stop to think, we realize that we truly know each other, love each other, and communicate with each other only through spiritual qualities made manifest in the detail of character-expression — through understanding and appreciating in each other the unique God-reflecting character-facets which make us what we are. Communication between us is always mental and spiritual, always a question of Principle producing its own harmony in countless individual ways. Words and voices are merely the unimportant temporary vehicles. The real communication and companionship goes on in the spiritual realm, unseen by the physical senses, and because it is never anything to do with the physical, nothing that happens to the physical can affect it for better or for worse.

Who has not had the experience of finding his thinking moving along the same lines as his friend's, although not a word has passed between them and they have been unaware of considering the same subject? Such instances lift the veil of materialism and through them we can more easily accept the ultimate truth of relationship, the truth which is established by the fact that we are all ideas of Principle and Principle evolves its own harmony through the relationships and associations of its ideas. As soon as we cease to focus thought on physical phenomena, we find it opened to spiritual evidence, whose

fruitage is an increasing sense of joy for ourselves and therefore must also be the same for those we love.

These relationships go on even if through human beliefs and ignorance we may not be aware of it. When an individual goes to sleep at night, he may believe that there is a great gulf between him and his friends or even a special friend with whom he is sharing the room, but on waking he finds that no separation has taken place. And so it is with us and the belief of death when we bring this belief into subjection to what Jesus meant when he said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11).

"Had Jesus believed that Lazarus had lived or died in his body, the Master would have stood on the same plane of belief as those who buried the body, and he could not have resuscitated it" (S&H 75:16-20). That statement from "Science and Health" gives us a line of reasoning which will require continual alertness, but which, when we attain to the certainty about it which was the Master's, will enable us to do as he did. Above all it can relieve us here and now of any sense of separation from those we love, and through this we shall learn how not to *wait* for a reunion, but instead find here and now a deeper unity than ever before. Every one of us knows even now that if someone we love goes away for a period, his individuality frequently stands out in much clearer outline and brings him closer in our true cognizance of him than when his physical presence lulled our true awareness, and so our love and gratitude are deepened.

Consciousness is consciousness and remains consciousness, and the realization of this comes through the lessons which reveal that truth to us. The one great lesson which anyone passing "the portals of a new belief" (S&H 251:11) can learn, just as anyone here can learn the same — and should start to do so at once — is that belief in matter plays no part either to benefit him or to deprive him of the ability to enjoy Life. The parable shows unmistakably that "the flesh profiteth nothing" either to do good or to do harm to anyone. It could not bring the rich man life and satisfaction, and it could not deprive the poor man of life and satisfaction, although their ignorant belief that it did caused their different individual experiences. There-

fore the rule is to give matter no power now either to take from us happiness or to endow us with happiness, to take from us life or to endow us with life, to take from us understanding or to endow us with understanding. This means that every single one of us, whatever our beliefs, can wake up to discover that the kingdom of heaven is within us, within our present possibilities of expressing it.

Our own assertion that we are immortal does not prove us to be so, but our realizations that we are the expression of Life, Truth, and Love prove that we must be immortal, for the qualities of thought and experience covered by those terms have always been immortal. Therefore if we wish to become certain of our immortality, let us cultivate our understanding of what Life means, what Truth is, and what Love embraces.

So this parable brings out, firstly, that no one dies in the sense of passing out of existence and, secondly, that the passing the portals of a new belief will only prove to the individual that because he has not died as a result of material processes, he never lived because of those processes. He will see that his material life had been supposed to end in death, but death has not taken place and so the belief of life in matter could only have been as much a dream as the belief of death has proved.

The only thing which is not a dream and can never be taken from us, here or hereafter, is what is based on reality, the kingdom of heaven within us *now*. We can never lose the spiritual ability and initiative which we have developed and expressed under the impulsion of Principle. In the last analysis we are but Principle's expression of itself, so this is not ours to lose. Therefore what we should cultivate is our realization of this. We need a clear and scientific understanding of the nothingness of matter and just as clear an understanding of the somethingness of the spiritual. Then we shall not rely on the wrong thing or put our trust in it as the answer to our longings, but shall have increasingly the joy that no man and no experience can take away. "The belief that existence is contingent on matter must be met and mastered by Science, before Life can be understood and harmony obtained" (S&H 427:9-12).

The following paragraph illuminates the path to which the parable points: "Progress is spiritual. Progress is the maturing conception of divine Love; it demonstrates the scientific, sinless life of man and mortal's painless departure from matter to Spirit, not through death, but through the true idea of Life, — and Life not in matter but in Mind" (My.181:8-12).

We should realize that it is not necessary to die in order to find out that we cannot do so. The time will come (and should be now) when we have the high goal always before us — namely, that there is no death. This was the goal set forth by Jesus, and he conducted his reasoning in every direction in accord with this ideal. He so developed his sense of Life and its meaning that finally his whole consciousness was filled out with the obviousness of its ever-presence and he could say, "The prince of this world [ignorance] cometh, and hath nothing in me."

The best way to deal with all speculation is to take what we know and have, use it and live with it. In the light of this we can see why at the head of her chapter "Science of Being" Mrs Eddy included this quotation from Martin Luther: "Here I stand. I can do no otherwise; so help me God! Amen!" The individual should realize that here he is, equipped to enjoy life, which he is bound to have, equipped with intelligence, which is present for him to utilize, and that he can and should adopt the standard of living of the great Master. With him, "life was not merely a sense of existence, but an accompanying sense of power that subdued matter and brought to light immortality" (Ret.58:7-9). That is where the individual stands and where he will always stand. Death is no more real than tomorrow is real — both of them are vacuous concepts and will never exist. How wonderful it would be for anyone who accepted this and simply said to himself, "All right, I am an immortal being and so I am not going to concern myself with speculation as to the future. I am going to concern myself only with Life and all that that means and how I am living it at this moment."

This day is ours and we are here, and with us is all that Science tells us. The child arrives on the beach, takes what he has — bucket,

spade, sand, water — and lives! Nothing else concerns that child as he fills his “now” with happiness and joy. There is a lesson in this, and whenever we meet those who fully express Life we find that they are like that child.

May not Mrs Eddy have summarized the whole purpose of this parable in these words: “Life is eternal. We should find this out, and begin the demonstration thereof” (S&H 246:27-28)?